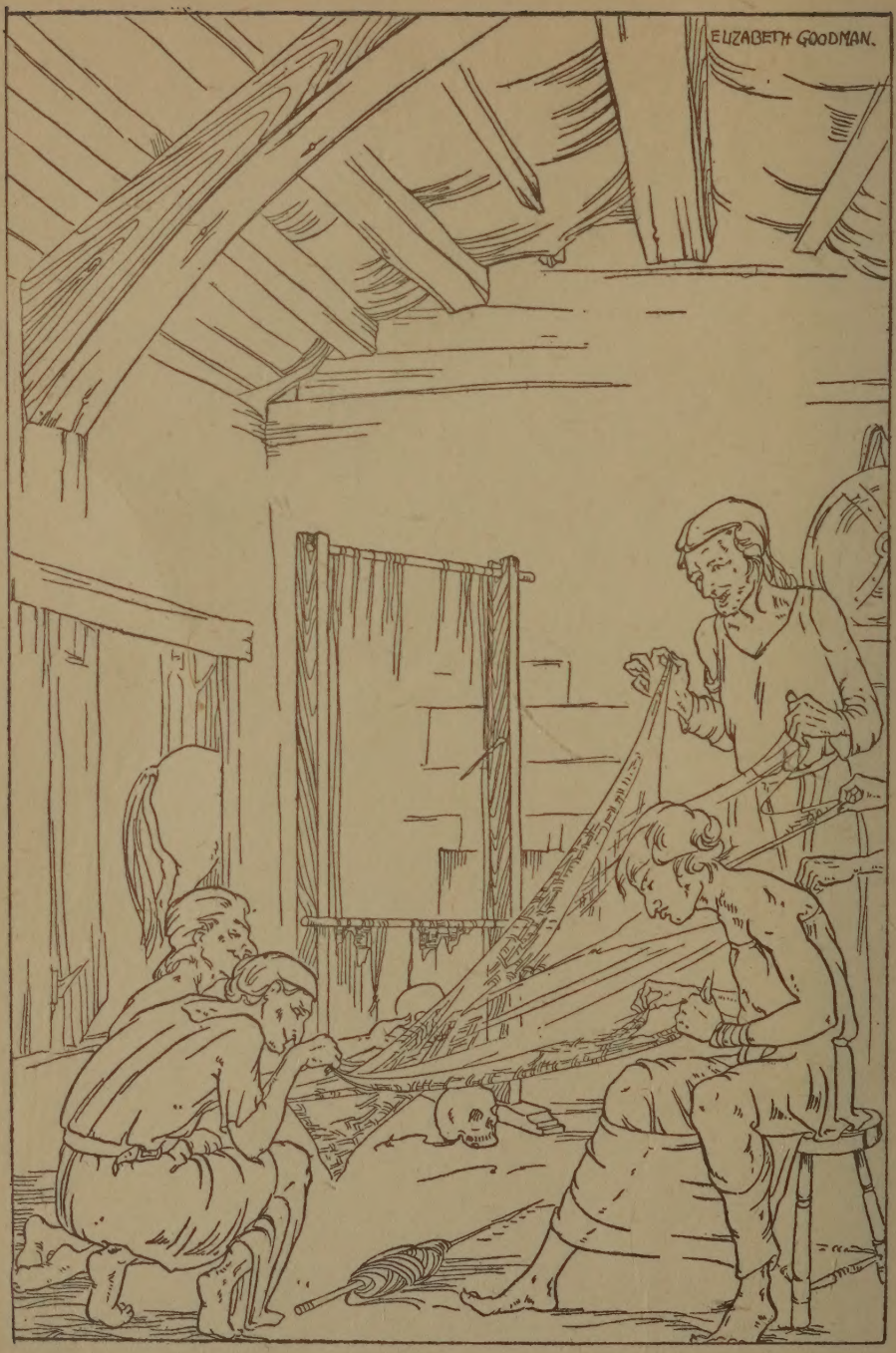
THE WAYLAND DIETRICH SAGA

THE WAYLAND-DIETRICH SAGA

PART I.

THE SONG OF WAYLAND

VOLUME III.



"Web o' Javelins." (See page 89.)

THE WAYLAND-DIETRICH SAGA

THE SAGA

OF

DIETRICH OF BERN

AND HIS COMPANIONS

Preceded by that of

WAYLAND SMITH

Their Deeds in the 4th and 5th Centuries, A.D., as told from the 10th to the 13th Centuries. Collected, set in order, and retold in Verse in the 20th Century

by

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PART I.

THE SONG OF WAYLAND.

VOLUME III.

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ERRATUM.

Page 144, line 7, *read* "Still can I hear the booming buccinae."

CANTO VII.

How Rowena, to revenge her kinsmen, poisoned Vortimer —How Vortigern, restored to the Kingship, recalled Hengest and his men; whereupon Hengest treacherously contrived to slay the British Lords in Council at Stonehenge, but Earl Eldol of Gloucester made his escape—How Vortigern gave up his walled Towns to save his life, and how Bishop Eldad won leave of Hengest to bury the slaughtered Thanes.

Turn we to Vortigern,[1] that wretched man
Of all Kings most despairing . . . He yet loved
Rowena, Hengest's daughter, who to him
Was passing soft and kind. Now this fair Dame,
Though young in years was fierce and wild of soul.
Her father's shame, her friends' and kinsfolk's deaths
She would revenge; deeply she thought thereon.
Oft sent she messengers to Vortimer;
She sent him jewelled bracelets from her arms,
All that she had, and necklaces of gold,
Asking his favour that she might yet stay
With Vortigern his Sire and do his will.
The old King also pleaded, and his son
Moved by compassion granted their request,

[1] Layamon, ed. Madden, II. p. 199-218; Wace, I., *lines* 7335-7488; G. of Monmouth, ch. XIV.-XVI.

But bade the heathen Dame learn Christian ways
And humbly live . . . Alas! He knew her not,
Nor thought that one so young would treacherous prove.
But she with witchcraft meddled secretly;
Then sent a Briton of her household train,
Whom she had bribed with honied words and gold,
Unto the youthful King to ask his leave
That she might have his counsel to her need.
This granted Vortimer with open heart.
Forthwith she rode to Canterbury town,
Where she met the young King. With greetings fair,
Her flashing eyes cast down, she meekly said,
" Hail to thee, Vortimer,[2] Lord King, this day!
Hail, Britain's Darling! I am come to thee
To receive Christendom in that same hour
That thou thyself deem'st fit." Blithe was the King;
What the Dame said he weened was sooth. Then blew
The trumpets to the feast . . . Joy reigned at Court . .
Water to wash the hands was swiftly brought,
With bliss in peace they sat down at the board.
The King's meal ended, thanesmen sat at meat,
And in the Hall was drinking, harps were played.
The King sat on the High Seat, glad of mood,
The women served the warriors. The young Queen

[2] Layamon, ed. Madden, II. p. 201.

Went to a tun where the best wine was stored,
And took in her white hand a golden bowl,
From whence to pour the red wine she began,
Serving the guests upon the Royal Bench.
She watched her time, filled up her bowl of wine
'Fore all the company, so to the King
The traitress came and hailed him, tasting then
The cup, she held it high as low she bowed.
" Waes-hael, Lord King! Joy be to thee and me " . .
Humbly she spake, and low she bent her knee . . .
To his destruction the King greeted her.
He smiled upon the Dame, for she was fair
And grievous seemed her plight, in her bright eyes
The tear-drops glistened, much he pitied her.
British spake Vortimer, in Saxon tongue
Answered Rowena; unto the young King
It seemed a pleasant game . . . He strove to speak
In the strange language, at the words he laughed
And she laughed too, but in her eyes lurked hate.
Hid in her bosom 'neath her vest she bare
A golden phial holding poison strong . . .
She held the cup again and " Waes-hael! " called,
" Drink," cried the King, and smiled, " Drink half
with me . . .
Drink-hael . . . Is that the word? O fairest Queen . . .

My father is absolved who wedded thee,
For thou hast marvellous beauty, wondrous worth,
Soon shalt thou Christian be and all go well."
At the King's bidding, half the cup she drained
And smiling looked on him, the while he laughed.
He gave into her hand his golden ring,
" Take this in token of my trust, sweet Queen " . . .
He turned a moment calling for more wine . . .
Deftly she held the bowl beneath her chin,
Having the tiny phial in her hand,
So poured the poison in, by all unseen,
And after gave the cup unto the King,
Who drank of that right deadly loving-cup,
Nor seemed the worse therefor. So passed the day,
Nor any thought was there of treachery.
When night had fully come the Courtiers went
Each to his place appointed. To her inn
Rowena passed with her attendant Dames
And Knights around her. Proudly she fared forth,
But not to rest. She ordered all her folk,
Her Knights and swains to saddle up in haste . . .
" Alas! My men, I fear some treachery . . .
The King means us no good . . . I heard some words . . .
For I can understand the British tongue . . .
We are not safe. Now let us softly steal

From out this Burgh . . Ride we to Thongcaster
And close us in . . . I must see Vortigern,
Scarce will he credit the strange news I bring . . .
His son would murder him " . . . So rode they thence
At dead of night. Rowena shewed the ring
That Vortimer had given . . . They won free,
And with her Ladies and her Knights she came
At length to Thongcaster, where Vortigern
Believed her word and hated sore his son.

But Vortimer that very night was ta'en
With sudden grievous malady, and knew
Without a doubt that he had poisoned been;
Nor might then leeches help him any whit.
In haste he sent out messengers to call
His Thanes around him . . . When they had come in
They found their King past help, so ill indeed
Scarce might he speak, yet rallied for a while
When his wise leeches gave him cordials.
Eldol, the Earl of Gloucester, held his Lord
In his strong arms. The tears ran down the cheeks
Of the stark Earl, who loved his young King well.
Said Vortimer, low murmuring in pain,
" My Lords, your patience . . . Hear me . . . dearest
Thanes,

Best of all Knights who ever served a King,
For me there is no hap but that I die . . .
And speedily . . . Eldol, give drink again . . .
Thine arm about me, Earl, so raise me . . . thus . . .
Ah! Passing sharp these pains . . . God send me strength . . .
So much to say . . . so weak . . . so little time . . .
Listen, my Thanes . . . Here give I ye my Land
To hold for Katigern . . . For Pascent too . . .
Trust not my Father . . . He will guide ye ill . . .
Yet no, not Pascent . . . He is rash and weak . . .
Why tarry they? . . . Rowena did this thing . . .
Bid them beware . . . Who had thought such young Dame,
So lovely and so sweet, could evil be?
Yet she had wrongs . . . Her kinsmen I had slain . . .
Take all my treasure . . . Silver, gems and gold . . .
Your worship will be greater . . . Eldol, thou
Have for thine own mine armour . . . Save my sword . . .
Give that to Katigern . . . Why comes he not?
Send ye for men from the outlying parts,
Stout sergeants trained to war, grudge not their hire . .
Give gold for pay . . . Fast hold ye our dear Land . . .
Avenge me, if ye can, on Saxon men.
Harm not my Father . . . Let him go in peace . . .

He loved me once . . . Misguided . . . Let God judge . . .
And spare the woman . . . Eldol, frown not thus,
Nor grip so hard mine arm, Earl . . . Thou dost hurt,
I am so weak . . . What, man, canst not forgive
An erring woman when thy King forgives?
I bear no malice . . . She had grievous wrongs . . .
I drave her father out in woe and shame . . .
When I am gone Hengest will come again . . .
Look to yourselves . . . Alas! I can no more
Rule ye with counsel, lead ye unto war . . .
I grow yet weaker . . . Eldol, friend, thy hand . . .
Where are the priests? . . . I'd make my peace with
God " . . .
They shrove him then and did assoil the King . . .
Weeping and wailing stood his folk round him . . .
Feebly he said, " Nay, grieve ye not so sore . . .
The way I now must fare ye too shall go
In God's good time . . . The way of all weak flesh . . .
I am your forerunner . . . When I am dead
Take ye my body . . . Lay in oaken chest . . .
Bear me to the sea-shore, there raise a mound . . .
Lest all my work be wasted do ye this . . .
A Barrow high to be seen from afar,
Near to the haven where the Saxons land
When they come here to spoil us . . . Set thereon

Mine image carved in brass, in martial gear . . .
My spear in hand, my helm, my harness on . . .
Which when they see, for fear of sorcery
They will avoid our coasts . . . Living or dead
There is no Saxon dare face Vortimer!
I do defy the knaves . . . Eldol, thine arm . . .
O friend! This pain . . . 'Tis time that I was gone" . . .
He strove to rise . . . With a great shout he cried,
"Down with the heathen dogs! Up, Britons all!"
So brake his valiant heart and thus he died
E'en as he spake.
What weeping was there then!
What piteous groans! Against Earl Eldol's will,
Against their gallant King's last vain desire,
They bore his body unto London Town,
And laid nigh Belyn's Gate with solemn rites;
No whit as the King ordered, for they thought
Better to guard that Town than the sea-shore.

Much now they feared the wrath of Vortigern,
Whom they recalled, the ill-advisèd fools,
And set him high again above them all . . .
A rueful deed was that for all concerned . . .
At his wife's prayer soon sent King Vortigern
Word to Earl Hengest that he come again . . .

" Fairest of Knights, know thou before all things
Dead is King Vortimer, safely mayst thou
Come hither swiftly . . . Vortimer my son
Hath paid the price of treason, he lies dead . . .
Yet bring not many folk . . . there is no need . . .
Lest that our Britons should take quick offence
And sorrow come between us."

Hengest heard;
Gladly he made him ready, but he came
With seven hundred ships and many men.
Suspecting British guile he now prepared
As ne'er before. Then he sailed unto Kent
And came to Thanet, whence the tidings sped
To Vortigern, who was seized with great dread,
Nor had he word to say. Oft had he woe
But never worse than then; and all his Thanes
Were sorrowful of heart, nor could give rede.
Hengest was cunning and of evil ware,
Felon of heart in truth, for he would wreak
Revenge upon the Britons. Thus he sent
False messages unto the King, and prayed
For peace and truce that they might speak as friends . .
" Peace above all I crave, and peace desire,
For peace I love and naught but peace require . . .
Nor would I have more war, nor land by force

Retain, but rather let the Britons choose
Which of us shall depart and which remain.
The rest shall hie them back from whence they came . .
I come not here in malice with my men,
But bring good guard for that I had a mind
If Vortimer yet lived to speak with him
Anent my brother's death, my sword in hand . . .
But dead is Vortimer, and now I come,
E'en as a father should to greet my son,
With peace and friendship unto Vortigern.
Peace will I love and wrong deeds will I shun,
Peace have and hold and love the Britons well,
And Vortigern the King above all men.
Now have I here around me many Knights,
The bravest of all men beneath the sun . . .
On a set day," quoth Hengest, " these I'll bring
Before the British people, and the King
Shall rise and choose two hundred of my men
To lead the van and guard his person well . . .
Aye, excellently well we'll guard our King . . .
And after let the rest of my brave men
Go home in friendship unto their own land,
To Saxony once more, but I remain
With Vortigern the King, the best of men,
Whom I love before all through everything."

Then well pleased was the King, who had no mind
To lose his Hengest, and the British Lords
Were also passing fain of his fair words.
They set a day and named the place and hour,
Appointing all to meet on Salisbury Plain,
Near Ambresbury Convent, a place called
Aelenge, but since that day Stonehenge 'tis named.
For fitting time May Kalends chose they then.
King Vortigern bade Hengest bring few men
To which the Anglian Earl agreed . . . and laughed,
Oh, he was blithe and merry in that hour!
But hidden in his heart was black deceit,
And crafty plots he laid to cheat the King.

It was proclaimed that none should weapons bear
When at the Council, lest perchance hot words
Should lead to blows and mellay uncontrolled.
Each party took sworn pledges, but alas!
Who may trust liar's word? And sooth to say
Hengest in this hour fell from honour's state.
He had become the wickedest of Knights,
Who once was noblest of the Saxon band;
For villain is he who doth thus deceive
His benefactor . . . Who had ever dreamt
That Hengest would betray the King who had

His daughter to his wife? But so it was . . .
The Anglian Earl spake with his men and laughed,
A hard light in his eyes . . . " Now will we go
Three hundred men all told, the rest bide here
And wait my summons . . . Ye, my trusty friends,
Shall lay aside your arms as custom bids,
Yet for all that we will not trust our foes . . .
These Britons are full wily . . . So slip ye
Your sharp two-edgèd saxes in your hose,
Laid by your shanks close hidden by your boots,
As I shall do myself. Then sit ye mum,
And hearken to the speakers in the Thing;
But mark me well, and when I give the word,
' *Nemet oure saxas*! ' Draw your knives, my men,
And home with them in the fool Britons' breasts
Ere they shall know the meaning of my words,
So shall ye make good neighbours of these men,
Else will they surely slay us " . . . Horsa spake,
With puzzled frown, turning as pale as death,
Then red as fire . . . uneasily he laughed . . .
" We will make sure of them, and thus revenge
Poor Othar's ill-timed death, yet would it were
In battle, not like this " . . . But Hengest mocked,
" Art thou turned child again? Dost think that they
Will let us go from Council living men?

We but forestall them, Brother . . . Yet stay here
If thou dost shirk thy Leader's orders, man . . .
Best keep at home and mind the house and bairns,
If thou turn'st woman, Horsa! " . . . Whereat he
With angry glance and fiery words spake then,
" Thou mockest, Hengest, but thou play'st a game
With blades two-edged and deadly . . guard thyself . .
I shirk no duties . . . I obey my Chief . . .
Yet see that thou one day repent this not."

Then came the day appointed, and the King
Bade all his best and wisest Thanes attend.
In goodly garments came they weaponless,
Lest evil mood should mar that gathering
If men felt at their sides their sharp swords swing.
Then met in Council with them Hengest's men,
And all were mingled in dear amity,
Sitting there cheek by jowl. The British Thanes
Without suspicion talked of their new plans
How best to rule their land . . . In peace they sat
In their rich raiment, and all unarmed men . . .
Quoth Hengest, that black traitor, who in truth
Of all Knights most deceitful now was proved . . .
" Hail unto thee, Lord King, see here my men,
Each of us is thy subject come in peace;

Now if it chance that any of thy folk
Through malice or ill-judgement hath at side
His sword or other weapon, of thy grace
Send it without far from us in goodwill.
Let us sit here in amity and speak
Of concord, how we may live out our lives
In pleasant peace together, faithful friends.''
So spake he wickedly, and Vortigern . . .
Here was he too unwary . . . made reply,
" Nay, my Lord Hengest, we be all unarmed
Even as ye are. Be there Knight so wild
That he hath dared come hither sword in hand
Against mine ordinance . . . Why, on my head!
He shall lose his right hand by his own blade
Unless he speedily do send it hence '' . . . He glared
Upon his Knights. Grumbling, some few in haste
Unbuckled swords, or from their belts drew knives,
Bidding their henchmen take them out of sight.
Then had they naught in hand, as naked men
Were they against their foes, yet had no dread.
They mingled with the Saxons. Here and there
Knights passed down the long tent, up gallery stair,
Talking and walking very brotherly,
Till all had come within and taken place . . .
The wine-cup circled, all men sat in peace . . .

Hengest saw well the hour he wished had come.
Then, of a sudden, rose the Anglian Earl
And loudly shouted, " Draw your saxes, men!
Bravely bestir yourselves, strike home, spare none! "
Whereat the Saxons at their Leader's word
Drew forth their hidden knives and each man smote
His neighbour where he sat close at his side . . .
Unwitting were the Britons, naught they knew
What meant the outland words till they had felt
The sharp steel pierce them . . . Fiercely their stern foes
Drew as one man their knives, to right and left
Stabbing and thrusting. Then on every side,
Before, behind, they felled men to the ground . . .
Four hundred men and five of the King's folk
Fell there and died . . . Woe, woe to Vortigern!
But Hengest, who stood very near the King,
Willed not his death. E'en as he gave the word
He grasped him in grim grip and by his cloak
Drew him towards him quickly . . . The strings brake
Of Vort'gern's royal robe, so strong that grasp,
Yet was he saved thereby from that dread stour . . .
The murder passed him by . . . Though he must see
On every side his hapless Thanes struck dead;
For those who used their reddened knives thrust through

With their keen blades both mantles, cloaks and vests;
Paunches and breasts they pierced; on back or face soon lay
Over four hundred of the noblest men,
The richest and most valiant in the Realm.
Yet for a time some won without the press,
Running outside the tent pursued by foes;
But naught had they to fight with save the stones
And sticks that strewed the ground, or the oak stools
Within the tent, which, snatching up, they used
In self-defence and did no little harm
Unto their base betrayers, slaying thus
Some few of Hengest's men. As for the King,
The Saxons set upon him keen to kill,
But Hengest held him fast and guarded him
Against that raging crew, nor suffered he
That they should slay him. He stood firm between,
Crying, " Nay, harm him not, for naught but good
Have I had at his hand, much has he toiled
And for my profit . . . Think ye I'll permit
My daughter's mate to die by such base death?
Stand back, ye fools, and rather let us hold
The King to ransom. He shall with his towns
And his walled palaces pay for his life.
Back, Hengest's men, d'ye hear me? Get ye back . . .

By Odin! Else I'll split the first man's head
Who lays a finger on him . . . He is mine " . . .
As long as the fight dured he guarded him,
And his fierce war-dogs sullenly fell back.

Meanwhile Earl Eldol, Gloucester's gallant Lord,
Gat him a mighty club in his right hand
That he found lying at his feet, nor recked
Who might have brought a churl's club in that place,
But with the heavy staff he warded him,
Defending well his body. Whom he smote
Forthright he died . . . Before, behind he struck,
And laid men to the ground, so came without . . .
Like to some raging bull baited by dogs,
Head down he charged and won forth to the plain,
Cleaving a blood-strewn pathway through his foes,
Till ten and sixty of Earl Hengest's men
Had cause to wish that Champion was not there . . .
Whomso he got at he brake that man's limbs,
Sending him down to Hell . . . Of some the heads,
Of others arms and shoulders, or their legs
He crushed and shattered . . . Where he laid about
Was terror and confusion . . . Men fell back,
Nor took he wound or scathe . . The knives they flung
Went wide or warded were . . . So at the last

He won unto his horse which tethered stood
Beneath the willows by a little brook,
A strong and speedy steed of passing worth.
He sprang upon its back and leapt the stream,
Riding apace to Gloucester, his own town;
Here entered he and had the gates locked fast,
Bade his Knights arm, so sallied from the Burgh,
Marching through all the land. Then they drave in
The cattle from the fields, and garnered corn,
And took of live stock, and brought in the folk
Within the Burgh with bliss. So sat therein
With gates fast closed and guarded them with care.

But Vortigern his Lord was in ill case.
Quoth Hengest sternly when the fight was done,
Looking with scorn upon th' unhappy wretch,
Who stood there trembling, pale-faced, fearing death,
" Hold up thy head, King, we will spare thy life,
But all thy Burghs must thou give up to us
If thou wouldst longer live . . . Or else thy share
Shall be but heavy sorrow, Vortigern " . . .
Seeing the King unwilling, sullen, wroth,
He bade his men fast bind the wretched man,
" Tie the fool up until he choose to speak,
Yet harm him not for my Rowena's sake."

Then gyves exceeding great they laid on him
And bound his feet in iron fetters fast,
Nor might he e'er bite meat or speak with friend
Till on a Holy Relic he had sworn
To give them all they asked, his towns, his burghs,
His lands and goods . . . Aye, even all his Realm.
So did he as constrained and was set free,
A humbled man and wretched, hating all.

Meanwhile with Hengest's leave came that good man
The Bishop Eldad, kin to Gloucester's Earl,
And took the bodies of the murdered men,
In Christian fashion with due rite and prayer,
To bury them not far from Caercar'doc,
That now is Salisbury called. They lie
Within the churchyard of the convent there,
Founded by Abbot Ambruis . . . There they rest,
Who had come peaceably and all unarmed,
Nor dreamt to treat of aught save touching truce,
So met their deaths at hands of evil men,
Oath-breakers, who have since had their reward.

CANTO VIII.

How Hengest and his men rode from Stonehenge to Canterbury; how on their way they passed through the Andredsweald, and what befell them there.

Then Hengest ravaged all the Southern March . . .
From Sorbiodunum[1] eastwards on he passed,
Towards Kent he rode as conqueror unchecked.
Yet not to Venta[2] his course did direct,
Nor to Calleva,[3] but by olden ways,
By British green rides came he to that town,
Called then Al Lapidem, but Stoneham now . . .
By reason of a mighty Stone there set
To honour some great King of ages gone,
Whose name is now forgotten, dead his fame . . .
Which town right ill-defended open lay,
Nor could bar Hengest's entry to its cost.
Its public buildings and its fanes he razed,
Its people slew in divers cruel ways,
So left it burning . . . Unwalled towns he sacked
That lay athwart his path, and, as he rode,
He burnt the villas of the countryside,
Destroyed all hamlets, farmsteads, granges, barns,
Priests in their Churches 'fore the Altars slew.

[1] Old Sarum. [2] Winchester. [3] Silchester.

With fire and sword he laid waste all that land,[3A]
And there was none to stay him and his band,
None left to bury those thus ruthless slain.
They of Calleva heard the direful news,
And cowering lay behind their new-built walls;
Venta Belgarum closed fast her great gates;
Her citizens in terror watched o' nights,
Her sullen guards . . . Who aped the Roman names
Of " Cohort " and of " Legion," yet had naught
Of discipline or aptitude for war . . .
Stayed in their barracks grumbling, much aghast
At the dread rumours. In them help was none.
Thus Hengest at his will rode through the land,
Driving the Britons, slaying them like sheep . . .
Those who would fly towards the hills were ta'en
And butchered horribly. If others came,
Exhausted by starvation, kneeling low
Before their cruel and relentless foe,
Willing for sake of bread bond-slaves to be,
Then would the Saxons fetter the poor knaves
And make them toil in chains, but each tenth man
In sacrifice unto their Gods they slew
In evil fashion, terrible to bear.
Some of the Britons fled beyond the sea,

[3A] Layamon, ed. Madden, II. p. 219; G. of Mon. ch. XVI

Grieving in vain for kinsfolk left behind . . .
More fortunate these folk than others, who,
Cleaving to their own land, must drag out lives
Of squalid misery hid in the hills,
In the wide woodland wastes, or rugged cliffs
That inaccessible were deemed; and here
In want of everything they trembling dwelt,
Their plight more wretched far than that of brutes.

Avoiding now the Roman road that leads
By strong Clausentum,[5] south to Portchester,
Hengest struck north across the rolling downs,
Taking the Ridgeway . . . Then due east he fared . .
No longer tarried he to burn and slay,
Nor turned aside to where some burgh at bay
Defied his raiders, nor made the attempt
To scale the mount of mighty Chankbury,[6]
Whose strong ringed fortress men see miles away
Stand sentinel on its thyme-crested hill . . .
Not now he'd challenge those on guard within . . .
Though that should come, he muttered scornfully
As he rode on across the wind-swept heath . . .
Now, wide to north and east a great wood crept,
Swamping the crests of all the lower hills,

[5] Bittern. [6] Chanctonbury Rings.

Climbing the flanks of the outlying downs,
A swaying sea of green and russet-brown . . .
He passed by Heaven's Gate that heaves on high
Its steep-cut track, then, bearing to the left,
Came to the Roman terraced-way, so down
Into the ploughlands and along a vale
Where 'neath their heavy yokes black oxen toiled . . .
He slew the steers, the helpless ploughmen too,
Leaving that dale a shambles for the sake
Of getting for his riders store of beef . . .
Nor recked he aught of those who held the Camps
Of Edburton and Wolstanbury, who
For their part made no onslaught, but kept snug,
Deeming perchance that what passed in the dales
Mattered no whit to keepers of the hills.
Now below Ditchling rode he, while the flame
Of Ditchling Beacon soaring lit the sky
To warn the folk in all the hamlets round,
And in the hill-forts, that their foe drew nigh . . .
But Hengest and his riders still fared on,
Though ever on the north their path was barred
By that dense wood that covered all the land . . .
They skirted Malling Hill as best they could,
Keeping 'neath cover of the forest trees,
Lest those who held Caerbryn[7] should make attempt

[7] Mt. Caburn, near Lewes. Cf. *Downland Pathways*, p. 20, etc., A. H. Allcroft.

To stay their march . . . But ne'er a Briton shewed . . .
The great fort on the hill stood unassailed . . .
An island 'midst the floods . . . " Held not by men,"
So muttered Hengest's riders, " but by ghosts " . . .
For dreary loomed that mist-engirdled height,
And strangely threatning was its loneliness . . .
Then Hengest rode past vineyards and tilled fields,
Taking the upland way cut in the chalk
By Romans skilled in making noble roads,
Unto the Cross-ways, where he sacked and burnt
The little *vicus* that lay nestled there . . .
Through Ringmer then he rode towards the north
Along an ancient trackway little used . . .
Nor might he now avoid the woodland wild . . .
Before him lay the gloomy Andredsweald,
That mighty forest, dark and terrible
By reason of its crooked winding ways,[8]
Its haunted hollows and its grisly shades,
Where lurked dwarf bushmen and fierce outlawed thieves
More savage than the beasts that roamed its glades . . .
In summer all the country round lay hid,
O'ershadowed by a screen of green-leaved boughs . . .
Now it was autumn and the forest flamed

[8] Cf. Camden, folio ed., p. 358 (Forest of Dean).

With marvellous tawny-red and orange hues . . .
So wondrous thick the wood that hardly men
Might thread the maze of mossy grass-grown paths . .
Where once the Roman legionaries trod,
And toiling cleared a road, now all was choked
With tangled briars and brambles . . . Monstrous docks,
Sorrel and thistles, nettles, giant weeds
Of every kind, once more obscured the track.
Felled wood had rotted by the river-banks,
Small streams were dammed, and in the hollow grounds
Vast marshy pools had formed, a stagnant mass
Of matted willow-roots like fox's brush[9]
Spread wide abroad, and over all was laid
A quilt of floating duckweed that some call
The Swimming Herb or toadspit . . . Near at hand
Crept wandering moneywort insidiously
O'er sagging banks; to seek whose trailing leaves
Come wounded snakes to heal them of their hurt . . .
There too waxed Poor Man's Salve . . Brook betony . .
That cures diseases to the leeches' loss . . .
The marshy ragworts grew here straight and tall . . .
Those Fairies' Horses that vile witches steal,[10]
So skim the moors and soar o'er craggy peaks,

[9] Cf. Jefferies, *After London*, p. 4 (Duckworth).

[10] Cf. Burns, "*Address to the Deil.*"

Riding their ragworts with right furious speed
To meet the Black Elves and fell Nastrond's fiends
At certain seasons as Dame Hela bids . . .
About the edges of the reed-swamps grew
Tall beds of bulrushes . . . Reed-maces too
Reared high their ponderous heads . Lances-for-Lads,
The Saxons called them jesting, but some say
That they are water-torches, and 'tis true
Their pollen blazeth brightly when 'tis fired . . .
Cat's spears or battle-shafts the Brythons name
These mighty reeds, and I have heard monks say
That 'twas this reed the mocking soldiers set
In the Christ's hand as sceptre ere they slew
The Lord of Life, who is the Christians' God . . .
Here the bruised beewort yielded its sweet scent[11]
As Hengest's horsemen rode along the edge
Of marshy streams and trod it under foot . . .
Old Waermund leapt down hastily and culled
A handful of this sedge . . . The others laughed . . .
Quoth he, "Aye, mock me, but 'tis cinnamon-sedge,
And I have learnt 'tis good 'gainst mickle ill;
Wait till ye groaning lie with aguish chill,
Then shall ye beg for sweet-flag and get none" . . .
Near by three-angled Arrow-heads were seen,

[11] Sweet-flag = *Acorus Calamus.*

Floating in swampy meres amidst the reeds
And flowering rushes, where the branched bur-reed
Shewed bead-like fruits o'er which in scuttling fright
Gold-spotted beetles ran. Across the pools
Darted bright blue-mailed dragonflies in haste
Seeking their prey, the insects of the air.
The soil beneath the mass of water-weeds,
Of sword-leafed flags, of sedges and of reeds,
By them shut in from daylight and fresh air,
Grew rank and boggy . . . Naught but a morass,
By spikes of loose-strife and rose-willow bay
Still sparsely fringed, though shrunken now their wealth,
Their purple glory for a time laid by . . .
Beyond were stunted thorn-bushes, hung round
By lichens grey and green. Where once were fields
Some early settler had been keen to till . . .
Though now the golden charlocks blazed no more
That late had spread abroad their cloth o' gold . . .
Yet yellow sow-thistles allured there still
By milky juice the dainty-feeding hares,
And scattered seed unchecked; still daisies tall
Amidst the wild oats and the struggling wheat
Turned their great ox-eyes to outstare the sun.

Now through the inmost holts rode Hengest's men,
Where overhead no glimpse of sky was seen,
But boughs and crookèd arms of trees were twined[12]
And tangling twisted, till, close-bound, thorn-set,
And implicated grown, this hoary wood
Defied intruders, shewing bristling briars
As an old ban-dog, girning, shews his teeth . . .
Herein was infinite store of fallow deer,
Yea, and great stags with stately branching horns,
And many woodland beasts fed there at will,
Slinking to cover when they scented men . . .
Wild boars, wolves, foxes, brocks, and fierce wild-cats
Roamed o'er the hursts and ravaged in the dells,
Rooted and trampled in the turf-grown glades,
Or clambered in the moonlight o'er the fells . . .
Still in the copses there was sound of birds . . .
The throstles softly sang at break of day,
The chattering jays yet screeching protest made,
As through the brushwood pushed the Saxons on . . .

I heard a strange thing from King Vortigern,
Who told me much when we two were alone . . .
He said they were nigh trapped by hellish imps,
And seemed to think these fiends were after him

[12] Cf. Camden, *Forest of Sherwood*, p. 550.

For his sins' sake, which I thought well might be,
For I had heard strange stories of his deeds . . .
He told me this of Hengest and his men . . .

From out a wooded gorge they saw rise high
A steep hill-slope, stripped naked, bare of turf,
On which were clustered queer-looking black mounds . .
The Saxon raiders heard mysterious sounds
As they climbed 'tween the trees up the steep slade,[13]
Beneath their feet the earth seemed as alive . . .
Ochta dismounted and his ear laid close
To a small rift he noticed in the chalk . . .
Quoth he, " I hear as 'twere an hundred smiths
Working beneath i' the bowels of the earth . . .
Hist, Comrades! Hear ye not their bellows blow?
The sound of hammers that on anvils ring,
And now the whir of knives they whet within? "
Said Oeric, "Aye! 'Tis all too plain to hear,
And listen to that crackling as of fire
Within a furnace kindled . . . What is here?
What wizard smiths forge devils' gear below?
Oh! Hearken to yon knockers, tapping slow! "
Roared Hengest, " Mount, lads! Here is mystery
And evil magic . . . Tarry not . . . Ride on!

[13] slade = coombe.

In Loki's name! Who bade ye quit your steeds?"
Cried Horsa suddenly, "Ride we with care!
Beneath our feet are pit-holes whence come flames!
See over yonder on that bare hill-side
Is not that smoke that I see curling rise?
Are those not cinder-heaps that mask the fires
Of hidden furnaces? . . . 'Tis miners' work . . .
Be they now men or devils that smelt ore . . .
And look where comes their greeting!" . . As he spake
A storm of arrows darkened all the sky,
Small darts flew fast, round stones were hurled from slings
From secret places . . . Vainly now men strove
To meet their hidden foemen hand to hand . . .
Naught could they see . . . Then Hengest bade them ride
In scattered order. "Loiter not," cried he,
"Stragglers are doomed, but keep your shields up, men,
Your ranks yet wider . . . An they come in force
Await my call . . . Then, Sons of the White Horse!
Close in and charge" . . . But when the sun went down,
From out the hideous darkness of the wood,
Like myriad swarms of bees there swiftly sped

The Little Folk . . . The dwarfish miners . . . who
Are of no British stock, but rather elves
Who for long ages have dwelt in these wilds . . .
Fiercer than hornets came they rushing on,
Throwing sharp darts and most strange javelins
That had huge hammer-heads, which, being flung,
Returned unto their owners' hands again,
For to their wrists it seemed they fastened them
By strips of deer-skin . . . Such things use the Gauls
And call matàris, so at least I've heard . . .
With these the miners struck down Hengest's men
That some they slew outright, but others seized
And dragged them shouting, struggling, out of sight
Into the dark recesses of the wood,
That men saw them no more, nor knew their fate . . .
But some said later they heard anguished screams
Blend with the ghostly tapping underground . . .
Grimly they closed their ranks and smiting hard
Brake through the loathly horde that pestered them . . .
Then shuddering, much disheartened, muttering rode
Right sore adread, for they thought Nastrond stretched
Beneath their feet, and that their fellows lay
Suffering dire torments from the fiends in Hell . . .
But Vort'gern, though affrighted, chuckled low;
That not on him but on the Saxons fell

This fearful doom pleased his dark spirit well.

In some parts the great woodland shrank and shewed
The bare and rolling downs, with rounded heads
Capped by short turf, midst which the chalky soil
Glistened in snowy patches . . . But below
Was seen a belt of dark and gloomy yews,
Beyond which oaks and beeches swept for miles . . .
A swaying sea of bronze-streaked greenery,
Splashed here with crimson, there with grey or gold,
And orange-tinted flaming radiancy . . .
As though some giant's outstretched grasping hand,
Cased in a wondrous jewel-broidered glove,
Clutched Mother Earth with sprawling fingers spread.
Far off, blue-grey in the soft twilight haze
That gan to wrap the land in a pale shroud,
Towards the north lay long low curving hills . . .
Interminable seemed they, and as far remote
As promises of foes made yesteryear
That ne'er shall see fulfilment . . . Lost at last
In the dim blueness of oncoming night.

Next day the Saxons rode through smiling vales
And spacious plains, ringed in by pleasant slopes

Covered with luscious grass where fed fat kine . . .
Beneath their mighty stallions' hooves the meads
Spread like a woven carpet . . . Aye! This land
Of Britain stands gem-decked as laughing bride . . .
Its sparkling fountains and full rivulets
Far-wandering trickle over snow-white sands,
And its wide rivers clear as crystal flow
With gentle murmurings that soft soothe to sleep
The weary traveller resting on their banks . . .
And all the Southern Isle is fit to till,
Bearing abundantly the golden grain . . .
Rich too in lea and pasture for the flocks,
Nor doth it lack for vineyards and good wine . . .
Are there not bee-hives in each hamlet set,
And in the marshes a great store of birds?
The rivers too, are they not stocked with fish,
With eels and salmon? On its shores are shells[14]
In great abundance, 'mongst which men oft find
That fair shell called the *Murex*,[15] from which comes
A wondrous scarlet dye, a lovely tint
That sun fades not, nor rain, but it with age
Grows yet more beautiful . . . And Emperors wear
Robes of that shade when they go garbed in pride
And honour to their feasts . . . Here too men seek

[14] Cf. Bede, Eccles. Hist. I., ch. 1. [15] Whelk.

And find in plenteous store the rarest pearls . . .
Not only purest white, but every hue,
Some pink or purple, others green as jade
Or as the young fresh grass, others as blue
As hyacinth or summer sky at noon . . .
Quoth Wayland, "Stay, friend! I have seen some pearls[16]
That came from Britain's shores, and found the same
Poor things of dull and dusky livid hue,
That had been gathered with but little skill . . .
Nor have I heard from Cormac aught but ill
Of this land that thou praisest, for he swears
That there it raineth ever night and day;
Or, if it ceaseth, then the place with fog
And misty humours is enwrapped so close
That none may see his fellow though he walk
Touching his arm . . . Moreover in those coasts
Do ride the witch-kin on their rushen steeds,
And cursèd warlocks haunt the dismal woods . . .
By Ægir! Wanderer, 'tis an evil land!"
Quoth Nornaguest, nor seemed one whit abashed,
"Why, truly, Sir, I tell but what I saw . . .
If Kormac had foul weather now and then,
So too had I . . . Yet naught do I recall

[16] Cf. Tacitus, *Agricola*, ch. 12.

But the rare beauty of the Britons' land,
And its sweet loveliness " . . . Quoth Wayland then,
" Methinks that I must visit this charmed realm
Before I die, to learn what magic spell
It casts upon the folk who seek its shores . . .
Maybe I might find there my long-lost peace . . .
Tell me yet more, good Wayfarer " . . . Said he,
" O mighty Smith! Such Craftsman as art thou
Were welcome to the folk of every land!
Thou shalt find honour and a great renown
In Britain, be thou sure . . . Nor shall thy name
Aye be forgotten . . . Though dim grow the tale
With passing of the years, yet ever men
Shall talk of Wayland, famous Master Smith,
With bated breath as of some ancient God . . .
Whose mighty wraith doth burst the bands of Time,
Above the fog of legend and of myth
Rising for ever . . . Lonely, grim, sublime . . .
Forgive me, Master, my presumptuous words,
Nor think I speak in idle flattery . . .
Now of Earl Hengest's deeds, an thou so wilt
I'll tell thee further, both of good and ill . . .

The Saxons chased the cattle o'er the hills,
And slew full many very wantonly . . .

Now rode they on the outskirts of the weald,
Where prickly thickets grew of gold-starred gorse,
O'er which crept thread-like dodder that fast clutched
With strangling dark-brown claws its helpless host,
Which, though it goes mailed by a thousand spikes,
Can ne'er contrive to throw this Hell-weed off . . .
And patches of wild raspberries mingled there
With brambles, ringing russet-berried thorns . . .
The coral hips of the dog-roses glowed
Crimson amidst the bronze-hued bracken tall . . .
The fleecy clouds of traveller's joy yet veiled
The nut-hedges, and, drooping to the earth,
The bullaces and blackthorns' branches shewed
Full laden with their glossy ebon fruit . . .
While rosy crab-apples fell rattling down
Upon the Saxons' cone-shaped glittering helms . . .
Still in the sunny oak-glades roamed the swine
Rooting for acorns . . . Brown-leaved hazels bore
A tempting load of nuts, and everywhere
Of blackberries and bilberries was store . . .
Down the slope riding fared Earl Hengest's men,
Saxons and Angles, Frisians, Jutes and Danes,
A motley crew, all seasoned war-fain men . . .
They found low-nestling on the sunny side
Of a tall group of beech-trees a rude hut,

A herdsman's *hafdy*, wicker-woven, round,
With conical thatched roof, whence slowly rose
Blue whorls of smoke, and in the dell below
There sat the herdsman singing . . . Naught he knew
Of raiding Hengest and his savage crew
Till in his back he felt a Saxon spear,
And, rolled amidst his bleating sheep, he died . . .
Down in the meadows by a sluggish stream
Stood ancient elm-trees where the rooks had built;
Across the lea a heron slowly winged,
With heavy flight he travelled 'gainst the wind . .
From out the reeds and rushes of the fen
Rose every now and then some water-rails,
Bitterns and coots and many snipe and quails . . .
Down in the valley maidens laughing came
Unto the water-side, where in the brook
Some washed and beat white linen . . . Others filled
Their earthen pots with water . . . Startled, one
Screamed as she saw the Saxons riding down,
Slow trotting from the wood, o'er the hill's brow . . .
They, seeing these young girls, spurred on their steeds
And gallopped racing down the turf-grown hill
With yells of triumph . . . In their horrid glee
Mocking and laughing as though fiends of Hell . . .

Shrieking, the luckless maidens scattering fled
Towards the hamlet on the farther slope,
But ere they reached it most were overta'en,
And some were captured; others cruelly slain,
Pierced by the long ash-spears, or trodden down
Beneath the horses' hooves . . . Some hapless maids,
Slung o'er their captors' saddles, wildly cried,
And strove to free themselves, but all in vain . . .
For with rough grip the raiders mastered them
And held them struggling 'gainst their mail-clad
breasts,
Or strapped them to their cruppers, laughing loud
In uncouth merriment . . . Then, when they came
To where the straw-thatched beehive houses stood
In one long narrow street, they gallopped through,
Slaying the folk therein . . . Here were but bairns,
Old men and women, half-grown stripling lads,
Young wives and maidens . . . for the full-grown men
Long since had marched to join Prince Katigern,
Or else had perished in some border war . . .
The Saxons chased the remnant up and down,
Spearing the screaming wretches, nor left one
To tell the tale or to revenge that wrong.
Quoth Hengest grimly, " Fire the thorp, nor leave

This nest of vermin lest it foemen breed " . . .
So they burnt that lone *tref* and many more
Till all the land was as a charnel heap,[17]
And for the slaughtered Britons' sepulchre
Served their burnt hamlets and their smouldering
towns . . .

[7] Layamon. ed. Madden, II., p. 219.

CANTO IX.

How Hengest sent Vortigern and his wife Rowena into Wales—How Katigern gathered a host to drive out the Saxons, marching from London to Rochester—How Nornaguest came to Hengest's Camp near Canterbury, what he saw therein, and how he sang the Lay o' Javelins to Hengest and his men.

Thus reckless fared the Saxons through the land,
And where they passed rode Death on their right hand,
And Plague and Famine followed on their heels . . .
But merrily the raiders, well content,
Brought back their spoil to the fair fields of Kent.
With Hengest in sore dread rode Vortigern,
Bound like a felon, chained in bands of iron . . .
Once more they'd fettered him lest he should flee.
He marked his people's ruin with dull eyes,
Uncomprehending, blind from misery . . .
He spake to none and no man spake with him
Till unto Durovernum[1] they rode in . . .
Then was he dragged before Earl Hengest's face
Roughly enough, who, smiling, watched him come . . .
" Confirm by oath thy late-made promises,
So shalt thou have fair mercy, noble King! "
Vort'gern renewed his pledges, grieving sore,

[1] Canterbury.

And stood there glooming, eyes cast on the ground.
Earl Hengest had him from his fetters loosed,
He would have taken now his prisoner's hands;
With a rough jest he cried, " Come, Vortigern!
Waes-hael! What! Hast no heart in thee?
Art not a King? Thy gifts with lavish hand
Hast thou bestowed . . . Look up, man! Thou art
free . . .
Thy loyal guardsmen wait to thank thee, Sire!
Drink to their health, nor sulk unmannerly
Lest they be wroth . . Quick-tempered are my men " . .
But Vortigern turned from him with a scowl . . .
With shaking fingers he plucked his white beard
As down his pale drawn face rolled scalding tears . . .
He sobbed with rage and shame . . . Then hid his face
In his long mantle, so stood sullenly
With shoulders heaving, muttering broken words . . .
In half-contemptuous pity Hengest turned
And bade Rowena tend her husband well . . .
" Take him from out my sight . . Do what thou wilt . .
Go West, girl, if thou choosest . . . The poor fool
Has had enough to bear . . . But keep him still . . .
I'll have no tumult nor vain mutiny . . .
His folk at Gloui want him not; I hear
They have ta'en Eldol in, their doughty Earl,

And locked their gates close 'gainst their lawful
King . . .
Yet has he other fastnesses in Wales,
So, Rowen, take him thither for a space . . .
Thou too hast need of rest, my pretty one . . .
See that thou train thy bonny babe to be
A warrior fit to hold this troubled land . . .
Thy little Gotta[2] shall be mine own care;
Guard well my grandson, lass, and Frey guard thee! ''
Proud answer made Rowena, ''At thy word
I, but a child, was wedded to that sot,
That dotard whom my soul despiseth . . . Yet
He is my husband by my father's will,
And this my babe doth share his blood as well
As thine and Odin's . . . That none may deny . . .
But how hast thou entreated us, my Sire?
Thou hast in shaming him, shamed thine own child,
And on thyself brought something of contempt . . .
I loathe this weakling unto whom I'm bound,
Yet will I urge a manly courage still
To brace his wavering heart, who once was famed
For boldness and audacity . . . We will ride West,
And I will rule if Vortigern doth quail . . .

[2] Cf. *Triads*, 21, 37. (Myv. Arch. p. 403/4.) Loth, *Mabinogion*, II., 237 (Note 2).

Wales will I hold and master, Sire, for thee" . . .
Then privily went Vort'gern and his wife
Into the West Country;[3] and Vort'gern knew
No pleasure more nor comfort in his life,
Not seeing how to stand against these fiends,
These cursèd Saxons, who had slain his Thanes . . .
Though he still loved his wife, he feared her more . . .
Her savage mood repelled him . . . In his child
He fain had ta'en delight and loving joy,
But the babe ever screamed when he drew nigh,
Till Rowen angered, drave him from her sight . . .

News came to Hengest, brought in by his spies,
That young Prince Katigern had gathered men,
Britons from out the Eastern Coasts, well trained
To fight in Roman fashion . . . These marched out
From London southwards, orderly and grim,
Their hearts firm fixed to save their fathers' land,
Their hearths and homes, their helpless bairns and wives,
From Anglian robbers and from Saxon thieves.
From Durovernum Hengest fared to meet
The British host, which he at heart despised . . .
Quoth he to Horsa, "Now shall Othar be

[3] Layamon, ed. Madden, II. p. 220; Wace I., 7490-91; G. of Mon. ch. XVI.

Revenged on these vain fools, who think they are
As Cæsar's Legions . . . The poor silly sheep
Who march in order and their standards raise . . .
Their ' dragons ' and their ' eagles ' . . . and do call
Their leaders ' tribunes ' and ' centurions '
In childish mimicry of Roman ways . . .
What chance have they against our war-fain wolves,
Our hungry sea-hawks, who 'neath the White Horse
Gather unto the slaughter? '' So rode he
Right fierce of mood, contemptuous of his foes . . .
But ere he left the town he had it fired,
Fearing its citizens might turn on him . . .
The little City standing in the marsh,
Built up on piles, that overlooked the Stour,
That pleasant stream that slow winds to the sea,
Was now destroyed . . Its massive walls thrown down,
Its two fair churches burnt, though there yet stands
With blackened tottering walls the little fane
That holy Martin's memory recalls . . .
Nor wall, nor marsh, nor river-channel served
To save this City from the Saxon brands . . .
When they their fell work ended there remained
Naught but a ruin, very desolate,
Whose smoke soared high to Heaven . . Hengest bade
His men spare none of those who'd been his hosts . . .

He gave command that they should waste that land
And slay the folk thereof . . . Where Horsa rode
And Hengest ravaged easily is traced
By smoke-grimed ruins and by fields laid waste . . .
Where passed his savage Frisians, his wild Jutes,
His murderous Saxons and his Anglian fiends,
The track was marked by smouldering cinder-heaps.
Burnt grain and blackened bones of beasts shewed plain
Where once stood well-stocked granges, prosperous
farms . . .
So they rode north spoiling that pleasant land . . .

Now, worthy Host, I will relate to thee
How I have knowledge of Earl Hengest's deeds . . .
It was in early autumn that I came
At my Lord's[4] bidding from the Hollow Land,[5]
With token for the Sons of Constantine,
To proffer friendship and to offer aid.
Misled by tidings that these Lords had sailed . . .
For Rumour's tongue was busy weaving lies . . .
I sought Aurelius in the Kentish land.
In trader's cog I crossed the stormy seas;
We steered for London, but unfavouring winds
Drave us far south beyond the mouth of Thames.

[4] Sigurd. [5] Holland.

We came next day to Dubrae's chalky heights[6]
At early dawn. The mists dispersing shewed
White soaring cliffs that very threatening seemed
Suspended o'er our heads; and far above
A strong-walled fortress frowned . . . Our little craft
Passed through a narrow cleft between these heights
Into the harbour and unchallenged there
Let go her anchor . . . Landing at our ease
We walked the streets of Dubrae's ancient town,
Which were yet filled by quaking Britons, who
Thronged round us strangers, greeting us as friends . .
They told us all they knew and much they guessed
With babbling voices, by great fear possessed,
For they had few amongst them men of war . . .
The able men and trained long since had gone
To join the host of Kat'gern, or had sought
The Western marches, or the far-off North . . .
Some had ta'en ship for Britain overseas,
Armorica in Gaul . . . Those that were left
Were feeble folk and old, no use in war.
Their Warden Petrus told me I had best
Retrace my path . . Quoth he, " What dost thou here
Seeking Aurelius, who will never come . . .
And if he did is yet but young to rule,

[6] Dover.

Nor is he proved . . . We want not a young fool . . .
Here may we look for naught but grievous ill;
Woe comes apace . . . Strong Rutupae is down[7] . . .
Regulbium[8] has surrendered . . . Both the Gates
Of Thanet thus are opened, and we hear
Portus Lemanis[8A] is in sorry case,
Her Governor fled, all unrepaired her walls " . . .
The Veteran's face was drawn . . . " I will not go . .
I shall stay at my post . . . 'Tis fitter so . . .
I, who was once a Tribune . . . I, who served
'Neath Theodosius' self in Gothic Wars,
And in the Twentieth Legion won a name,
Much honoured by my peers . . . I, Brython born,
Am Roman citizen . . . I do refuse
To fly before barbarians . . . But, young man,
For thy part get thee from this ruined land
To whence thou camest, while there yet is time."
Said I, " Nay, Sir! Not so is mine intent . . .
I thank thee well for hospitality,
For kindly thought for a lone wanderer,
But I will ride now through your land of Kent
To seek this Katigern of whom men speak
As son of Vortigern the banished King.
I hear it blazed abroad through all this town

[7] Richborough. [8] Reculver. [8A] Lympne.

That he hath gathered to him a great host . . .
Lords from the North and West flock to his call . . .
Maybe some there have news that well shall serve
The Sons of Constantine . . . Moreover I
Have hope to pass through Hengest's host unharmed . .
I know his tongue . . . I am by birth a Dane,
And have some fellowship amongst his kin."
Said Petrus darkly, "Art thou traitor then?
I had best stay thee . . . Yet no . . . Get thee gone!
Truly I know not who is Leader now . . .
I served King Constantine, yet Vortimer
I loved and honoured also, but his Sire
Does evil in the eyes of God and man . . .
Take thou a horse from out the Castle-stall
And ride thy ways . . . Yet first tell me thy name,
For thou seem'st bold and daring, and a man
After my heart " . . . Said I with ready tongue,
Giving the name by which I am best known
Amongst the Anglians and the Saxon kin,
" I am called Widsith, the far Wanderer " . . .
We parted thus . . .
I rode out thoughtfully
Along the broad highway from Dover town,
That, mounting ever, crosses the great down . . .
Long after leaving Dover's line of tombs

Its course was hedged on either hand by walls,
Earthworks and many barrows . . . For some miles
It ran straight on, a shining streak of chalk,
Between tall rows of elms and poplar-trees
Planted to shelter weary wayfarers;
Sometimes each side was flanked by ditch and bank,
Sometimes a low stone parapet was raised,
And culverts built where it crossed little streams . . .
Tall mile-stones clear inscribed marked all that road,
Whereon I read the names of by-gone Lords,
The Emperors of Rome, with flattering clause
That mocked their fallen glory . . . Plain were writ
The names of long-dead ruined Maximus
And Gratian, whom he murdered . . . So 'tis said . . .

From the high ridge that my steed gained at length
I rode, deep musing, at an easy pace
Down t'wards a valley o'er a heath-grown moor,
Where ne'er a soul saw I nor sign of life . . .
Though once this great high road . . So Petrus said . .
Was thickly thronged with traffic . . . Many men
Going and coming daily . . . Dense the dust . . .
The once loud rumbling of the chariot-wheels,
The clatter of the flying horses' hooves,
The pattering of the patient plodding sheep,

The lowing oxen's trampling shuffling feet,
The yelping bark of curs, the shouts of men
Who urged the flocks and herds along that road,
The merry chatter of foot-passengers
Who gave acquaintances and friends good-day,
Were heard no more . . . Deserted, dreary, lay
The ill-kept track bestrewn with scattered stones . . .
Broken in parts and miry was the way . . .
I passed by spots where rest-houses still stood
And little taverns set by the road-side
For thirsty travellers fain to make a stay;
But these lay empty, ruined, desolate,
No longer guests dared linger by the way . . .
Wind-swept the moorlands, yet down in the dells
Lay sheltered hamlets, and I saw afar
Fair villas and rich steads with many barns . . .
Dotted about the dale, girt in by woods . . .
Not yet the greedy Saxons had swept bare
The Vale of Kent . . . But, as I gan descend
Towards that city lying in the plain
That once was Durovernum called, I saw
Rising about the land a darkening veil
Of smoke that hid the country-side for miles,
And where the city should have stood I saw
As it were a furnace blazing . . . Drawing rein

On the great moorland's brink I paused
To ponder then my course, for well I knew
The sign of Hengest and his savage crew . . .
Now, as I hesitated, being loath
To leave the high road for some unknown track,
Yet fain would skirt the ruins of the town,
From out the heather sprang up a tall form
Which had lain hidden there right cunningly . . .
My scared horse started, sidling, as a man,
Well armed, stood threat'ning 'thwart the way and
stared,
Spear ready poised . . . A Briton by his dress,
Who a loose tunic wore and rings of gold
Twisted about his arms, but on his head
A gilded casque such as the Romans wear;
Upon his back a little harp was slung,
Not old was he, but active, lithe and young . . .
He looked right hard at me, then with a frown
Spake in the Frisian tongue, " What dost thou here
Who wearest Northman's dress? Art thou then left
A straggler from the cursed Saxon's horde?
Thou shalt not wander far, thy fitting road
I soon will shew thee " . . . Raising high his spear
He made as though to cast it, but I cried
In British tongue with which I am acquaint,

"I am no Saxon; little love I them,
Nor yet am Jute nor Anglian; I was born
In Denmark's land . . . But what is that to thee?
I ride not as a foe, but hither come
To seek Aurelius, son of Constantine . . .
I bear a message from the Hollow Land" . . .
Quoth he, "Art mad? Aurelius tarries yet
Beyond the seas . . . Methinks thou liest to me!"
He would have hurled his spear had I not called,
"Stay yet thine hand! Can'st shew me Katigern?
I have a message for his ear alone . . .
Trust me in this . . . I stand defenceless here,
My sword in sheath, my shield I have not raised . . .
Are we not brethren? See, my harp I bear" . . .
I made a secret sign and looked at him;
"See, I give token who am Mithra's own,
High in His service, sworn to hold by Him" . . .
I spake in doubt, yet thought I caught a glimpse
Of Mithra's Symbol gleaming on his breast[8B] . . .
The Golden Lion . . . Swiftly I disclosed
A higher Token of the Seven Grades,
The Scarlet Chariot, Racer of the Sun,
That hung about my neck by golden chain . . .
For at that time I knew not the true God,
Of Whom Germanus taught me later on . . .

[8B] Cf. Elton, *Origins*, 2nd Ed., p. 337. Wellbeloved, *Eburacum*, p. 79, f. Windle, *Romans in Britain*, p. 203. Cumont, *Mystery of Mithra*.

Said he, with answering gesture, " Welcome, friend!
Though of a race unknown to me . . . Thy rank
In Mithra's Mysteries doth claim
My reverence and my service . . . Wilt thou now
Tell me thy will? But first hear thou my name . . .
I am called Taliessin, the Gleaming Brow,
And I am come, ask me not when or how,
For 'tis a secret I reveal to none,
Of Bran the Blessed's glorious royal line.[9]
I once was Bard of Cynvarch,[10] Meirchon's son,
The Lord of Rheged that lies in North Wales . . .
But now I serve Cunetha of Strathclyde,
The Duke of Britain, Cambria's new-made King.
In my Lord's train have I come to the south,
For Cynvarch and his kin with other Chiefs
Have marched in force to aid Prince Katigern.
They lie at Durobrivis,[11] whose strong walls,
Engirdled by wide Medway's placid stream,
Guard the great Bridge and Causeway that doth lead
On to Londinium . . . There they wait the foe . . .
But I came hither at my Lord's command
To mark the movements of these Saxon fiends . . .
Ye see there token of their handiwork " . . .

[9] Cf. *Mabinogion*, Lady Guest's Trans. ed. Nutt, p. 355.
[10] Father of Urien.
[11] Rochester. Cf. Camden (Kent), p. 333.

He pointed to the sea of flame below . . .
" Hengest fares northward, yet it were not wise
To linger in his rear . . . He hath keen spies,
His flying squadrons raid this wretched land . . .
Wilt thou be guided I have friends not far,
Natives of these parts, who lie hid below
In yonder bracken " . . . As he spake we saw
A troop of warriors riding up the vale . . .
" Mount thee behind me," cried I, but too late . . .
E'en as he lightly sprang and clutched my waist,
Behind us o'er the hill's ridge swiftly dashed
A score or more of horsemen . . . Saxons shewn
By their round bucklers and strange crested helms
No less than by their fierce and savage cries . . .
" Up, White Horse! Up, the Grey Colts! " shouted
they,
And were upon us . . . " Fly! " I hissed at him,
" Thou can'st not help me here . . . I fear them not . . .
I can pass for their kin . . . But thou wert doomed . . .
Fly, man, and save thy skin! " Down from the horse
I slipped and smote the beast . . . Springing, it fled
With Taliessin low crouching on its neck . . .
The Saxons' spears flew wide, save one that pricked
The bay mare's haunch that she yet faster sped . . .
Nor might they catch the Briton, whose light weight

Gave him th' advantage . . . Recklessly down-hill
He rode the frightened beast and swiftly came
Within the sheltering borders of a holt
Of ancient oak-trees, so was lost to sight . . .
The Saxon leader blew a warning horn
To call his riders back, who sullen came.
Meanwhile I stood defenceless, ringed by foes . . .
One man rode at me, prompt to cut me down,
Had not their Captain spurred his horse between . . .
" What dost thou, Hubba? Wait my word, thou fool!
Did not Earl Hengest bid us bring in men
That he might question them? Tie the rogue up
And truss him on thy horse." Resisting not,
I let them work their will, yet in their tongue
I muttered a few words. " Harm not my harp . . .
I am a minstrel . . . Welshman am I not " . . .
As he fast bound me to his horse's back,
Quoth Hubba laughing, " Have no fear for that . . .
Thou shalt sing loudly for us by and by . . .
What if Earl Horsa have a tender heart?
Hengest will question thee ere nightfall, then
To old Earl Wipped's care he'll give thee, spy!
Who knoweth well to wring the truth from men."
" Silence there, Riders! " roared Earl Horsa's voice,
" Forward! and that right speedily! " . . . We came

At a smart pace along the broad high-road;
Then, skirting Durovernum's blazing pile,
By a green track the Saxons took their way,
So rode till evening fell . . . My tight-bound limbs
Gave me such pain that I felt glad enow
When Horsa's voice rang out to cry a halt.
They set me down, bewildered, on my feet,
Within a space thick-strewn with skin-spread tents,
Banked round and roughly trenched . . . With some slight dread
I knew me prisoner in the Saxon Camp . . .
It lay upon the slope of a chalk ridge,
O'erlooking a vast marsh land to the east
That lay in shadow now, save here and there
Some broad creek of the sea flung back a gleam
Shed by the red torch of the parting sun . . .
Wide grassy stretches shewed a pearly grey
From white mists rising . . Peaceful was that scene . .
Beneath our feet in the fair vale below
Lay verdant orchards speckled rosy red
With richness of ripe fruit, and ordered vines
In long rows climbed neat trellis-work and poles . . .
Scant time had I to look ere I was seized
By horny hands that roughly gripped mine arms,
And now they turned my lagging steps away

So that I saw the rising land to south,
Which, far as eye could see, was ringed by fires,
Whose smoke rose up to Heaven, till the sun
Glowed like to molten brass . . . Above our heads,
Yet reaching not the turf-grown ridge's crown,
But nestling in the sheltered woody gap,
Stood a great house . . . or rather, once had stood . . .
For now its pillared portico appeared
Black 'gainst a red-hot furnace . . . Its fine halls,
Its pleasant bowers, its outhouses and barns,
Were all swift crumbling, crackling in fierce flames,
As though devoured by Loki's fiery maw . . .
And down the hill was borne unto mine ear
The last shrill screams of those who died within,
Mingled with shrieks of horses and of kine,
And the wild yells of pent-up, burning swine . . .
As I looked shuddering, scowling Hubba swore,
" Waste of good horse-flesh . . . Hela take the fools! "
But quoth a comrade grinning, " Never mind!
We'll have roast pork for supper . . . And, mark thou,
No trouble in the cooking " . . . So we came
Towards the centre of the Camp, and there
Fain had I halted, for my fear-struck eyes
Saw a grim sight that made my bristling hair
Rise pricking on my scalp and a damp sweat

Creep o'er my forehead . . . On nine stout elm-stakes
Hung nine black shrivelled shapes that once were men
In strange contorted fashion . . . 'Gainst a tenth
Still twisting writhed a moaning red-streaked thing
Stuck full of arrows . . . As I stumbling passed,
Dragged by my captors, I saw running there
A fair-haired lad . . . With a quick laugh he cried,
" Let me shoot, Comrades! " Even as he spake,
Taking his stance, he loosed from his yew bow
An arrow that sped swiftly, true and sure,
To the poor wretch's heart, whose body thrilled
With one last tremor, then it moved no more . . .
There rose a storm of protests, shouts and yells . . .
Quoth the young archer, " When I shoot, I kill . . .
These games mislike me, men . . . They are but dull . . .
What sport is it to quell defenceless foe? "
And now he faced them sternly . . . " Get ye gone
Unto your duties . . . So bids Hengest Earl! "
Growled Hubba sullenly, " Our Oeric crows
Loudly enough . . . The bantam waxes proud . . .
Get on, knave! " muttered he, and with a kick
Urged me right sharply forward, " Soon shalt thou
Shew us rare sport, whate'er young Oeric says,
If Aella has his will or Octha . . . They
Have no faint squeamish fancies . . . On, I say!

Lend me thy spear-haft, Cuthbert! Prod him on!
Give him the point '' . . . So thrusting, pricking sore,
They drave me on, and I my folly cursed
That e'er I came into this hornets' bike[12]
Without a struggle . . . Too late . . . Vain regret . . .
For now they dragged me through a mocking band
Of Hengest's warriors . . . Stalwart sturdy men,
Come fresh from war . . . Their white helms silvery gleamed,[13]
Adorned with gold, belted with jewelled bands,
With vizors fenced and cheek-guards chased with gold,
Hard-welded, burnished bright, o'er which there shone
Gold-bristled boars erect on either side . . .
Grey sarks they wore, and glittering damasked shields
Each man there bore, and in each warrior's hand
Stout ashen spear . . . Above their grey sarks gleamed
Their hand-forged byrnies . . . As they marched along,
In war-gear clad, their polished steel rings sang,
Their great swords swinging clashed that from their necks
By gem-sewn baldrics hung . . . They came within,
And I amongst them . . . Ease-fain were these men,
Come from some bloody raid, and others came
From battling with the waves, for brine-encrusted they

[12] nest. [13] Cf. *Beowulf*, *lines* 320-34, 1448-54, and 2605.

Fared with stained garments, sea-worn, weary men.
They set their shields . . . the broad hard linden-boards . . .
Along the tent-wall and swift stacked their spears . . .
The grey-tipped ash-shafts . . . As they bent themselves,[14]
Well-satisfied, unto the benches down,
Their byrnies clattered and their mail-gear clanged . .
Their vizored helms they doffed and from their breasts
Their harness gan to loose, with grunted jests
And hoarse tired laughter as of men who strive
By raillery to hide their weariness . . .
The maidens now great bowls of water brought,
Drawn from huge steaming vats . . . and they brought oils,
Sweet-scented, cleansing, for wayfarers' need . . .
Men stripped their gold rings from their sturdy arms,
The twisted bronze and gold from sunburnt necks . . .
So splashed the water o'er their war-stained limbs,
Laughing and joking in the Northmen's way . . .
They called for beer and mead and good brown ale . . .
Whereat ran lads and lasses speedily
Bringing them ale-cups, beakers of clear mead,
And beer in glass mugs brought they to their need . . .

[14] Cf. *Beowulf*, 327, 1013.

The ensnaring sweet and yellow mead they quaffed,[15]
And some there drank from monstrous urus-horns,
No scanty potion draining at one draught . . .
Thus did the warriors swiftly slake their thirst,
As I had gladly done who was sore parched,
But none there had compassion . . . Now gan they
Their golden collars and their arm-rings don,
And so set to their meat in merry wise,
Feasting on well-boiled pork and stewed boars' flesh,
Served round in vats wherein each dipped his spoon
To ladle liquor out, then plunged his hand
To get his portion, equal meat and fat . . .
Round wheaten loaves had each man to his will,
Nor lacked they butter, honey, and red cheese . . .
Seethed geese and capons ate they served with kale,
While some devoured fat rashers of salt speck[16] . . .
The busy cook-knaves from the Camp-fires ran,
Where they had kettles boiling, full of meat,
To bring fresh victuals to the hungry men . . .
Mine escort eyed the viands longingly;
Then, grumbling, dragged me on until we came
Nigh to the High-Seat . . Here the Chiefs had dined .
Some lay there drinking at their ease reclined

[15] Cf. Gododin ed. Stephens XI., p. 92 ; Skene, Vol. I., p. 377.

[16] Bacon.

On bear-skins spread o'er cushions on the floor . . .
Upon the High-Seat . . . a great carven bench,
Shapen at either end to semblance strange
Of rampant bears with gaping fang-lined jaws,
Sat the fierce Leaders of the Saxon hordes.
On benches round were gathered many Lords . . .
Anglians and Half-Danes, Jutes and Frisians . . . who
Drank now their fill from silver cups and gold,
From gilt-rimmed aurochs-horns inlaid with gems,
Or thick glass goblets, red and blue and green . . .
The boards were drawn, the drinking-feast begun,
And very merry now was every one,
Eager to drink the frothing mead and ale . . .
Clear ale and mild-brewed and the strong Welsh ale,
Such as the Britons brew, and rich red wine
Found in some Roman's cellar, these drank they
With morat,[17] cider, perry, and besides,
Spiced pigment made of honey and white wine . . .
With heads uncovered sat they, sword begirt,
Bold mail-clad warriors, ring-decked their great arms
For faithful service rendered to their Lord . . .
And golden collars wore these Earls and Thanes . . .
Bronze buckles fastened their broad leathern belts . . .
About their brawny legs were linen bands

[17] Mulberry wine.

Of varied colours twined unto the knee . . .
Above their heads were hung their glittering helms,
And in a shining row stood their round shields.

I marked them well as I stood waiting there
Outside a ring of ropes from wall to wall,
While Hubba from the head-guards entry claimed
In grumbling tones because they made delay . . .
" I have a spy, I tell ye, we have caught . . .
A minstrel, so he says, who shall bring mirth
With his fine songs . . . Whatever be their worth
Hengest shall hear them . . . Horsa bade me come,
So let me pass, Saefugel . . . Stand aside!
Or take the consequence . . See! Earl Horst's ring! "
Quoth Saefugel, " Well, get ye all within . . .
Billing, undo the rope and let them through . . .
The Chiefs are merry, drunk with mead and wine . . .
Hark to their laughter! What a roar and din!
They have boozed deep already . . . Would that I
Were of their company! My throat's right dry " . . .
Quoth Hubba feelingly, " I too am parched . . .
With luck I'll get a bucket of good ale
For thee and me, man, ere the night be passed . . .
Now, Minstrel, haste thee while thou hast thy feet . . .
What! Wouldst thou stumble? Come, get on, my
man! "

He and his comrade Cuthbert haled me on
Towards the High Seat . . . Blinking, I could see,
By the bright light from many torches flung,
How many noble Thanes and lordly Earls[18]
Lay over-drunk and wallowing in their cups,
As though dead men, upon the rush-strewn ground
Amidst the half-gnawn bones, o'er which huge hounds
And little shaggy dogs and greyhounds slim
Were busy snarling . . . Those amongst these Lords
Who still sat on the benches shouted loud,
Laughing with stormy clamour, gay with wine.
Upon the High Seat sat five Saxon Chiefs,
Of whom one Hengest I knew well to be,
For I had seen him in King Gjuki's Hall
As a young man . . . Now was he older grown
And in his prime . . . A fitting Lord of men
Was Gjuki's son, keen gleamed his cold blue eyes,
Like to an erne's eyes that doth seek its prey . . .
His thick fair hair curled over a broad brow,
Unwrinkled yet by age . . . High-bridged his nose
And straight, sun-bronzed his shaven cheeks . . .
He wore no beard save on his upper lip . . .
His firmly moulded chin, his close-set mouth,
Displayed his mettle, marked him for a man

[18] Cf. *Judith*, Canto X., ed. A. S. Cook, 1904.

Who knew well what he wanted, whose strong will
Would win him his desire nor weakly fail . . .
That night he sat unhelmed, nor byrnie wore.
His blue-dyed woollen sark fell in thick folds
Above the knee, with gilded leather edged,
Set with red jewels . . . A strong leathern belt,
Gold-buckled, held the tunic in its place . . .
About the low-cut neck thereof blazed gems,
Wide sleeves scarce reached his elbows, at the hems
Gold-broidered and bedecked with precious stones;
Cross-gartered were his legs unto the knees
With golden-studded scarlet deerskin straps . . .
A dark-blue mantle, with white bear-skin lined,
Was fastened by a red-enamelled brooch
On the right shoulder . . . His great sword lay hid
In crimson scabbard bound with golden braid,
Its pear-shaped hilt well garnished with gilt wire.
About his strong white neck a torque he wore
Of twisted links of bronze entwined with gold,
And on his arms were broad rune-carven rings . . .
Above the High Seat hung his mighty helm
'Gainst woven hangings, green and purple dyed . . .
The white helm, gold adorned, with belted bands
That thou, O Master, made with thine own hands
And fashioned wondrously . . . With boar-crest decked,

Inlaid with gold and flashing azure gems,
And side-pieces o'erlaid with silver plates,
And it was vizored very cunningly
With trellis-work that none but thou canst make
That it be durable and firm, yet light."

Quoth Wayland smiling, " I mind well that helm,
It was not all unworthy of my fame."

Said Nornaguest, " Earl Hengest thought the same . .
He valued that and also his great shield . . .
Oh, very cunningly was that shield wrought
Of the light linden-wood, with sevenfold
Thick plies of wolf-skin, edged by burnished rim
Of massy gold; and polished bands of steel
To strengthen it sprang from the central boss
That glittered like the sun . . . 'Twas made of brass
And had a long and very deadly spike " . . .

Said Wayland, "Aye . . . that shield I call to mind . . .
I made it for young Hnaef long time ago . . .
Then Hengest bore it . . . Now that he is dead
His son's son shall not find it wear the worse . . .
'Twill outlast many a Chieftain "—" Nay," said Guest,
" That shield still covers Hengest's gallant breast,

Though he lies lapt in earth . . . The British King
Who had him slain well honoured him when dead . . .
Master, have patience, hear awhile my tale . . .
It shall rejoice thy heart when thou dost know
Of mighty Hengest's valiant deeds and end " . . .

Beside him sat his brother, the good Earl
Horsa, the noble Atheling, far-famed
For kindly mood and mildness[18A] to his friends . . .
Clean-shaven he as any half-grown lad,
And looked still young as when he bare white shield
And won his first gold ring for gallant deeds . . .
I saw him then in old King Gjuki's Hall
Braving the hearth-fires to receive his sword . . .
Leaping the flames he knelt before his Sire
And was hailed Champion[19] by his fellow-thanes . . .
Then took his sword from hands of the fair Queen
His mother Swana, who, when girding him,
Kissed her son's forehead, fondly blessing him . . .

The bearded Kemps who sat beside him now
I knew not, but heard Hubba mutter low,
" 'Tis Waermund's self and Ælla on the bank
And Wipped too . . . But where are Hengest's sons?

[18A] Generosity. [19] Kemp.

The Grey Colts drink not . . 'Tis rank churlishness'' . .
Said Cuthbert in his ear, " Hold thy fool's tongue,
For look where Oeric and Earl Octha come '' . . .
I saw the two lads pacing up the Hall,
The elder's arm about the younger's neck,
Octha in war-gear, ashen shaft in hand . . .
The blue-grey steel rings of his byrnie rang
As he strode slowly on . . . His brother laughed
As Octha made some jest . . . Their cousin came
From where he sat . . . I knew him too by sight . . .
Ebissa, who had wedded Hengest's may
Hedwig, Rowena's sister, a fair lass . . .
A tall dark lad was he, more like black Dane
Than Anglian or Saxon . . . Tipsily he called,
" No mead for loiterers . . . nor ale is left . . .
Ye come too late '' . . . Said Octha mockingly,
Doffing his vizored helm, and with quick hand
Leaning his war-stained shield against the wall . . .
" Thou hast had more than lawful share meseems . . .
Give me to drink . . . A truce with idle words . . .
I've ridden far to-night '' . . . He seized the horn
From swaying Ebissa's loose shaking hand
And tossed the liquor off . . . " Hail, Hengest Earl!
I've done thy bidding . . . Raided the East Coast . . .
We have ta'en Mersea . . . Ithanceaster lies[20]

[20] *Othona*, near Bradwell-juxta-Mare.

In flaming ruin, blazing to the skies . . .
I have without a Roman dog fast bound
Who held the place . . . We dragged his body out
And found some life in him . . . The rest are slain . . .
A troop of Horse was guarding this lone fort . . .
No booty found we, save some well-trained steeds
That we saved from the flames . . . All else we burnt,
But brought this prisoner . . . Wilt see him, Lord?
He may have news " . . . Quoth Hengest, " Welcome,
son!
Aye, bring thy prisoner in . . . Horsa has caught
Some spy who lurked along the Dover Road,
Maybe between the two we shall find out
What force the Britons have and what they do . . .
I hear they linger north of Medway yet " . . .
At Octha's call two of his sturdy men
Dragged up the helpless captive . . . A slight man
In battered war-gear . . . Unhelmed, his dark hair
Half hidden by a blood-stained linen rag
Tied roughly round his head . . . Drooping he stood,
Supported by his captors . . . Said the Earl,
And in his fierce keen eyes I saw a gleam
As though of wonder, as with cruel smile
He slowly spake in the soft Latin tongue
With his rough Northern accent, " Greetings, Sir!

Long is it since we met . . . Dost know me not?
Why, Vivianus, we were comrades once . . .
Hast thou forgotten Valentinian's Court,[21]
And how ye Romans generously sought
To teach us Northern strangers many things?
Aye . . We learnt much at Rome . . And thou and I
Have that between us I have not forgot . . .
I owe thee something, Prefect . . . Nor would I
Be longer in thy debt . . . Dost not recall
How thou too owest me a trifle? . . . Thou
Didst take advantage of the Saxon dog
And made a mock of him . . . Hast thou forgot?
By Thor, so have not I! . . . The Emperor laughed
When thou didst flout me . . . Ha! Thou fleec'dst
me too,
Taking my money readily enough,
Won by thy weighted dice . . thou cheating hound!"
Stung by his taunts the prisoner raised his head
And with an effort groaned . . . "Base Saxon swine!
Thou liest . . . I ne'er cheated . . . Others did . . .
I'll not deny we were a rascally crew . . .
I had no cause to love thee . . . Blusterer . . .
A proud and boastful unlicked Northern cub . . .
Barbarian born . . . Barbarian art thou still . . .

[21] Valentinian II., reigned 375—392.

Let now thy ruffians make their sport of me
And wreak their will upon a wounded man . . .
It is the chance of war . . . Yet give me drink,
Lest I should cheat ye all " . . . He staggering fell
Back in the warriors' arms, who held him fast . . .
Said Hengest, " Give him wine " . . . One held a cup
To the poor wretch's lips, who gasping drank . . .
Then said the Earl, " Thou cringest not, I see . . .
Prefect, thou shalt not find me over harsh . . .
Give me what news thou hast, thus art thou free
To ship to Rome or go whereso thou wilt . . .
But first disclose the plans of Katigern . . .
What troops has he in hand? . . . Whom his allies? . . .
What orders hadst thou? . . . Dost thou serve 'neath
Rome
Or 'neath this British Kinglet? . . . Answer me! "
Said Vivian faintly, " Frisian dog, know thou
I have commission from the Emperor
To aid the Britons . . . That's enough for thee . . .
I'll tell no more . . . Now do thy worst on me . . .
May Mithra blast thee and as Mithra's Bull
So may'st thou perish " . . . Said the Anglian Earl,
" I have no wish to torture thee, my friend,
Although thou seem'st desirous to win fame
As martyr for these Britons, yet meseems

They are not worth it . . . Still, if thou refuse
To tell me what 'tis plain I'm bound to know,
Why, I must make thee . . . Sure, not hard the task,
If thou hast no more pluck than in those days
When we foregathered . . Hold him there, my men! ''
Rising, he strode to where the prisoner leant,
Shaking in his guards' arms, with downcast eyes . . .
With a hard hand he jerked the Roman's chin
And roughly raised the drooping hung-down head,
Then looked at him with cruel keen hawk's eyes,
Smiling to see his helpless victim flinch . . .
Quoth Hengest slowly, '' Vivianus, see!
'Tis useless to deny me . . . Speak, thou fool!
What! Lost thy tongue? We must find remedy . . .
Cynwulf, go thou . . . Bid thy men make a ring
And fix a stake out yonder . . . Torches set,
Then kindle fires of beech-logs speedily
That we may test this Roman warrior's mood . . .
Hryp, bring thou here thy sharpest hunting-knife
Wherewith thou skinnest deer . . . Aye, that will
serve . . .
Now, Vivian, we will dress thine head for thee . . .
I see that Octha shore a curl or two
When his hand smote thee down . . . Poor barber he . . .
We must improve on that and thou shalt have

Thy freeman's locks shorn to the bone to prove
That thou art thrall unto us Northern dogs,
For Hryp shall scalp thee . . . And, when that is done,
This will we do " . . . He hissed into the ear
Of the pale prisoner words I could not hear . . .
The warriors standing by right grimly laughed,
But Vivian shrank back gasping . . . Said the Earl,
" Then we will bring thee very carefully . . .
What's left of thee . . . unto the ring without,
And I will bid them slit thee, then make fast
Thy quivering entrails to the stout elm-stake,
So lead thee backwards till thy life unwind . . .
It will be a slow process . . . Thou'lt have time
To tell us all we want . . . How sayest thou?
I give thee one more chance . . . Come, Prefect! Speak!
What! Still thou stayest dumb? Hryp, scalp him
then! "
Cried Vivian, " No! . . Oh, Hengest, give me time! . .
I am so weak I cannot bear more pain . . .
I'll tell thee all I know . . . Then, on my shame
Have pity, kill me quickly " . . . Hengest said,
" Say on! I listen, Roman . . . I knew well
Thou hadst no strength left in thy paltry soul " . . .
But Vivian muttered, " Thou didst promise me
That if I told I should unharmed go free . . .

At least loose these tight bonds and let me sit . . .
I am too faint to speak, trussed like a pig . . .
Water . . . I want some water,'' murmured he.
Said Hengest, smiling, " Offa, loose his arms . .
Give him more wine . . . So, weakling! Take a seat
And get on with thy tale '' . . . He flung himself
Upon the High Seat with a mocking laugh;
But Vivianus, with a choking groan,
Sank on the bench they roughly pushed 'neath him,
And drank right eagerly from the horn mug
That Offa held to him . . . Then he looked up,
And now his face was very deeply flushed,
He got upon his feet and swaying stood . . .
His lips were moving, yet no words were heard . . .
Hengest bent downwards listening . . . Suddenly
The wounded man jerked forward and so lurched
Against young Offa's shoulder . . . As he fell,
Unseen by any, he snatched out the sax
That hung at Offa's belt . . . Too late aware
The Angle gripped his arm . . . But he had struck . . .
Deep in his own side the long blade he thrust . . .
Falling, he muttered, panting out his life,
" I'm coward, Hengest . . . coward . . . all too weak
To bear thy cruel torments . . . but this shame . . .
The traitor's shame . . . I cannot . . . will not . . .
bear . . .

My death . . . pays all . . . And thou, Barbarian,
own . . .
Whate'er my faults . . . I die true son of Rome . . .
I will . . . I will not " . . . Choking, he sank back
In Offa's arms, then twitched once, so lay dead . . .
Said Hengest quietly, " Go, bear him hence;
And let the women wash and cleanse his corse,
Then clothe him as for battle fittingly . . .
Make ye a pyre, so let his body burn
Upon the bale-fire . . . Honour pay we him
Who, if a weakling in the past, has won
Some fame to-night . . . I had not thought the man
Had so much grit left in him," muttered he . . .

Hengest looked round the tent and darkly frowned . . .
His roving eyes fell on my pale drawn face
Where I stood wearily, with arms tight bound,
And wondered what my fate . . Quoth the stern Earl,
" Why, what is this? Ah! Horsa, I forgot . . .
Thou hadst a prisoner too . . . Let's see the man " . . .
The impatient Hubba pushed me with such force
That I went stumbling nigh unto the ground . . .
With sudden anger filled I swore at him,
" May Loki roast thee whole, thou clumsy fool! "
Young Octha burst out laughing, Hengest stared . . .

Then, ere the Earl could speak, I cried aloud,
" Thou dost not give the Northmen's welcome, Lord,
To wandering minstrel . . . Know that I am kin
Unto thy Father's folk . . . I am a Dane . . .
Yet am I tied like ox that shall be slain! "
Said Hengest frowning, "Art thou not a spy?
What didst thou prowling on the Dover Road? "
Said I right boldly, as I faced the Chief,
" I sought thy Camp, Earl . . . I am lately come
From Fridleif's Court, for wandering I go
Singing through many lands and Courts of Kings
To earn my daily bread . . . By the Norns' will
My ship was driven from the mouth of Thames
To Dubrae, where I landed . . . There I 'scaped
From out the Governor's hands . . . He asked too
much . . .
For naught know I save what a minstrel knows . . .
I stole his horse when the man's back was turned,
So fled from out that town, chased by his men.
I met a rascal Briton on the road
Who filched my nag from me just at the time
When your men seized me . . . They mocked at my
plea,
And very wrongfully have dragged me here
Bound like some felon or absconding thrall " . . .

Said Hengest laughing, " Why now, hear the knave!
Horsa, this fellow hath a claim 'gainst thee!
What shall we do with him? Shall now our men
Shew us by torchlight their skilled archery?
Or shall we keep him for the Odin-Stone? "
Quoth Horsa, " Nay, but let him shew some sign
He comes from Fridleif's Court, it were not well
That we offend the Dane-King . . . Thou dost know
We have some kinsmen in the Danish land " . . .
Said I, as Hengest pondered, " Lord, give me
A chance to speak . . . Bid them unbind mine arms,
And let me have my harp they took from me " . . .
Said Offa hastily, " Lord, keep him tied . . .
Such rascals are too slippery by half " . . .
Earl Hengest harshly laughed, " Untie the man,
But hold his arms . . . Thou, Offa, hold thy tongue!
And see thou payest in three days thy fine
For losing captive as thou didst just now,
Or take the penalty . . . By Saxon law
Thou standst to lose thy harness and thy horse,
Or their fixed value . . . Save thou dost prefer
To pass between thy comrades' double ranks,
Urged down that lane by stinging sticks and straps . . .
Choose thou, my lad . . . I care not which it be " . . .
Offa in sullen silence stood aside . . .

Hubba released me, and from Cuthbert's hand
I took my harp . . . With stiffened fingers I
Opened its frame and took therefrom a brooch
That the Dane King once gave me for a song . . .
'Twas golden-edged, and set therein a gem . . .
A grass-green jasper stone with ebon bands
Commingled pleasingly . . . Said I, " Lord Earl,
Know'st thou this gaud? " Earl Hengest shook his
head,
" Not I," quoth he, " nor shall it save thee, knave . . .
Who art, methinks, no Dane but a Welsh spy " . . .
Said Horsa, " Brother, I know well this brooch . . .
'Tis one that Mimer made and Fridleif wore . . .
I know it by the markings on the stone " . . .
He took it from my hand . . . " See, here are runes
That, an I err not, shew King Fridleif's name " . . .
Said Hengest mockingly, " Why, Horsa, thou
Wert ever skilled in reading carven signs . . .
My sword spells out for me far better runes
That are writ deeper than these graven lines . . .
What if this man hath stolen brooch and harp?
Let him first prove that he knows how to sing
Ere we accept the word of unknown rogue . . .
A song would liven us . . . So, Wanderer,
We look to thee to make us sport to-night

One way or other . . . Which, depends on thee . . .
Let him stand free, nor throng him thus about . . .
Go, Oeric, bid thy mother join us here
And bring her maidens . . . Cynwulf, clear the tent
Of those too drunk to listen . . . Let the rest
Gather about the hearth . . . Less noise down there!
Fill up the beakers, Cupbearers! Come, drink!
Waes-hael, O Wayfarer! I drink to thee . . .
Thou art a bold man, and I warrant me
Wilt not disgrace thy kin whate'er the end
Of this thing be''—"Drink-hael, Lord Earl!" I cried,
And drank right thankfully the foaming ale,
For I was sore athirst . . . I rubbed mine arms
And stretched my limbs, then bowed low to the Dame,
Earl Hengest's high-born wife, who stately came,
Her women at her side . . . Gold-decked was she,
Ring-graced and royal-hearted . . . Smilingly
She greeted the rough warriors . . . So took place
Upon the High Seat . . . Then, at Hengest's nod,
I sat me down, my harp against my knee . . .
" Lord," said I quietly, " wilt thou now hear
A dream that came to me three nights ago
As I tossed on wan waters wearily . . .
For in that vision I saw Fate of Kings,
And Doom of Earls, and Death that overwhelmed

The mighty ones in battle, and brave things
That men did in the sword-play . . . And, at last,
When, hammer-forged, the gore-stained sword bit deep
Through crested helm and burnished shield and grey
rings of the mail . . .
I saw on whom their Wyrd did fall, I saw the cowards
pale,
I saw the dead men lying in their unbroken sleep,
I saw Valkyries flying who bare their souls away,
I saw the Northmen marching 'neath vizored helm and
shield,
And I saw men hail the victors who won that bloody
field " . . .
Said Hengest, "So? Well, Minstrel, sing thy song" . .
Then I played softly on my harp and sang
The Lay that is called Web o' Javelins[22] . . .

One Friday, Freya's Birthday, as I fared across the
moorland,
I saw folk riding, twelve together riding,
To a lonely hut at sunrise they took their stealthy
way . . .

[22] *Darradharljodh*; cf. Vigfusson & Powell, *Poet. Bor.* I. 283. Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning, ed. F. Jónsson, Vol. B, 2 Haefte, p. 389; Kershaw, *Anglo-Saxon & O. Norse Poems*, XI., p. 111-125. *Njáls Saga*, ed. Asmundarson, pp. 428-430, and Dasent's Trans., 2 vols., 1861.

There went they in and from mine eyes were hidden,
And I wondered what they did in secret at the dawning . . .
Though I'd called to them to wait, yet none of them would stay . . .

In that hut, as I drew nigh, I spied a little window,
A little window-slit through which I soon was peeping,
And I saw within twelve women, twelve spae-wives old and grey.

I could not see their faces, but I heard their mumbling voices,
And I knew them then for witches, who work spells in the night-watches . . .
Much I wondered they dare gather at the breaking o' the day . . .

I saw them set a Loom up . . . A strange Loom and stranger spinning . . .
Men's heads were the weights and the warp and weft men's entrails,
Bared swords had they for shuttles, and ill I liked that play . . .

For spindles had they javelins, sharp shining blue steel javelins,
And the reels thereof were arrows, the grey goose-fledged swift arrows,

And those women all sat singing as they set about their spinning;
But the dreary song they sang made me wish myself away,
For eerie was that tune and more eerie yet their lay!

"Wide stretched is the warp
That the death-fall forebodeth . . .
Slaughter of warriors soon shall befall . . .
Lo! The hanging cloud of the beam downpoureth,
From the skein of that warp spin we blood-red pall . . .

High on the spear-shafts the grey woof upcometh,
The web of the men-folk, that we, Friends of Odin,
With red warp are filling . . .
Warped is our web with the entrails of men.

Our warp is blood-red,
Our weft is the hue
Of men's corses long dead . . .
So spin we the web . . .
For many for few . . .
Men's lives our thread!

Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!
Bind we, bind we, its unravellings . . .
Spin, Sisters, spin!
The web wears thin . . .
Weave we, weave we, Fates o' Men!

We go not lacking for weights that are fitting . . .
Dead men's heads hang heavy drooping . . .
Hard-weighted our warp
With the skulls of the slain!
Blood-stained darts for spindles use we . . .
See! Our Loom is it not iron-bound?
Our reels are swift arrows!
Iron-shod is our spool . . .
Sharp swords are our shuttles!
Whereby from the War-woof
We weave Web of Victory . . .
The Battle-woof sley[23] we . . .
Warp blood-red, weft corpse-blue . . .
In Web o' the Javelins!

Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!
War-spite[24] weaveth, weaves Sword-
Swinger,
Weaveth Sangrith, weaveth Swipple,

[23] Sley: to force up the threads by means of the *Skeidh*, a spear-shaped implement of whalebone, perhaps a primitive shuttle. The O. Norse *skutill* = harpoon.

[24] War-spite = Hilda, Goddess of War.

Swift strokes in the war-storm dealing,
With drawn swords weave they grim
battle . . .
Shafts are singing, shields are ringing,
And the shattering axe, appalling
Helm-hound on the target falling,
Gnaws in fury . . .

Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!
Long and weary its unravellings . . .
Swiftly, Sisters, swiftly spin!
Lest the Web of Doom wear thin,
Weave we, weave we, Fates o' Men!

Ride we forth with the young Chieftains . .
Victory Gunnar! Glorious Göndul!
Bloody shields bear ye, Kings' Guardians .
Wind we, wind we Web o' Javelins!
Long and hard that Web's unravellings . .

Let us ride through the ranks rushing,
With hard blows the fighters crushing . . .
In the battle plunge we, faring
Where our friends shew forth their daring,
Crossing weapons with the foe . . .

Where Valkyries ride there the red Web is
woven . . .
Where the sharp arrows flit there the byrnie is
riven . . .

The spear-shaft shall split and the shield be cloven!
On, Valkyries! On we go!
Who our friend and who our foe
None but Odin's self doth know . . .
He commands and we obey . . .
Whom he wills shall win the day . . .
Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!
Leave to Odin its unravellings . . .

Where the warriors' banners streaming,
High upheld o'er bright helms gleaming,
Mark the hard-fought desperate fight,
Shew the Champions' perilous plight,
Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!

We can guard them, we can save . . .
We Valkyries love the brave . . .
Battle ordering, help affording,
Keep we Chieftains from the grave . . .
Or bring them unto Valhalla . . .
Death be theirs in Victory!
As bids Odin, so do we . . .
Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!
Spin we, Sisters, swiftly spin
Fates o' Men,
Lest our blood-red Web wear thin . . .

Lo! Sea-rovers riding

Shall soon be providing
Spoil for their kindred . . .
No longer abiding
In out-lying borders,
They win them new homes . . .

Wind we, wind we, Web o' Javelins!
The doom of the mighty ones Odin hath given . . .
A young King is fated in death to lie low,
And an Earl shall be riven
By spear-point . . . No niddering,
He shall die as a hero, his face to the foe . . .
Unto the vanquished comes bitter sorrow,
Trouble and grief and an unending woe . . .
Nor shall men forget, in the joy of new morrow,
How their land was laid waste and their kinsmen were given
To glut the fierce greed of wolf, raven and crow!

Now is the Web woven!
The warp streameth blood-red . . .
Oh, gruesome and dread
The sky lowereth o'erhead!
Clouds ruddy with gore are gathering round us . . .

Red rain shall downpour . . .
The air shall be dyed with the life-blood
of men!

We have spoken, we have sung,
Charms have woven, chanted long . . .
Sisters, raise your voices, sing!
War-winning lays to guard a King . . .
Lest he should perish, cherish him!
Chant, Valkyries, cheerily!

Take our song as warning token,
Thou, in whose ears it has rung,
That thou dost hear, that without fear
Learn well to-day . . .
Loiterer, go thou!
Wait not, go now!
Obey, Obey!

Bid thou the Chieftains hearken to thy Song,
Let all the listening warriors round thee
throng . . .
Tell them their time is short . . . The night is
long . . .
Bid them ride forth, nor tarry, while 'tis day . .

We too, we must away!
Let us ride, let us ride,
Our plunging steeds astride,

With drawn swords in our hands . . .
Bare Brands! Bare Brands!
Make ready all our gear . . .
Poise high the lifted spear!
Our darts we will be flinging,
Our shields shall soon be singing . . .
So, Sisters, mount! Away!
Far hence, far hence . . . Nor stay . . .

Now is wound the Web o' Javelins!
Long and weary its unravellings . . .
Fates o' Men have we now spun,
Warp and woof . . . Our task is done . . .
Ride we, ride we far away " . . .

I saw them pluck the woof down and rend that web asunder . . .
I saw them holding, each witch-wife firmly holding
The portion that she snatched as a she-wolf grips her prey . . .

I saw them mount their horses, their bare-backed great white horses . . .
I saw folk riding, twelve together riding,
No longer seemed they witches, nor women old and grey . . .

For they shewed helmed and mail-ringed, in glorious armour golden . . .

And I knew them for Valkyries, for Odin's Battle-Choosers,
As their shining spears a-shaking they fared forth on their way . . .

And six of them rode northward and other six rode southward . . .
I saw them riding, the band in twain dividing,
And I knew no more until I woke, and it was dawn o' day . . .

CANTO X.

How Nornaguest left the Saxon Camp secretly and rode with Taliessin to the Villa of Attius, where he had speech with Katigern, but got no answer to his message—How he stayed awhile with the Britons.

I cast my harp aside and sat there dumb . . .
I knew not what the Chiefs thought of my song,
For they sat silent for a space; but then
Some sprang upon their feet and cried " Waes-hael!
Well sung, O Wanderer! " And many there
Flung at me links of gold, and others bade
The Cupbearers pour mead unto my will . . .
Said Hengest, gazing on me steadfastly;
In quiet wise he scanned me searchingly,
" Thou hast sung none so ill, yet know I not
The inner meaning of thy Witch-wives' song . . .
That must thou now disclose . . . Tell first thy name!
Art thou a wizard thou shouldst dream such dreams? "
I rose and faced him. " Lord, I am well known
In distant lands and Halls of many Lords
As Widsith the Far Wanderer,[1] who goes
From Court to Court of Kings and sings his rhymes
To earn precarious living . . . Now will I
Unlock my word-store, I who, urged by Norns,

[1] Cf. *Widsith*, ed. R. W. Chambers.

Have wandered farther than most sons of men . . .
Through many strange lands have I fared, and there
Far from my race and country have I proved
Both good and evil, yet I now declare
That men of noble birth oft friended me;
E'en as your warriors, Earl, in this Mead-hall
Have given gold, so Kings gave gems to me . . .
With Franks and Frisians and with such brave Folks,
With Rugians and with Glommums have I dwelt . . .
The Romans heard my song in Italy . . .
The Lombards love me and the Saracens . . .
With Greeks was I and Finns and Syrians . . .
And once I sang before great Maximus,
Who ruled o'er many towns where revelry
And joy and riches in his time were rife . . .
Aye, Cæsar was he, and moreover ruled
O'er all that land that ye have since named Wales.
Lord, know thou that the Singers amongst men
Are destined to go wandering o'er the earth;
They cry their needs, they say their thanks to him
Who, dear to all men, loved well by the Gods,
May sure be found at last, or north or south,
Bounteous in giving, wise man of his words,
A Lord who doth desire to increase the fame
And honour of his Earlship 'mongst his men . . .

Sure such a noble Earl . . . till all is fled . . .
Till light and life together do depart . . .
Shall get much land, and high his famous name
Amongst folk under Heaven . . . Hail, Lord Earl!
Hail, Hengest! Raised by Odin to hold rule
O'er Britain's Isle . . . Hail! King of Engelland!"
Said Hengest, "Friend, thy words would please me more
Were I now sure that thy lips without guile
Spake thus so flatteringly . . . Tell me this . . .
For thou hast knowledge, doubtless, of the stars,
And wit to read the future . . . What means then
This dream of thine? What King, which Earl must fall?
And shall we Anglians have the victory?
If thou canst tell me this thou shalt go free
And honoured 'mongst my people" . . . Said I then,
"Lord, I know not as yet . . . But give me time,
And I will ask the Gods in mine own way . . .
So shalt thou know ere sets the next day's sun
What further I can learn of warriors' fates" . . .
Said Hengest, "Be it so . . . Horsa, do thou
This minstrel forthwith set in Ælla's charge . . .
Let him pass freely wheresoe'er he will
Within our Camp . . . Take now a gift from me

For thy strange song, O Wizard Wanderer . . .
Withal take warning! Wander not beyond
The borders of my Camp, else must thou die . . .
Which were a pity, for I find thy voice
Tuneful and pleasing . . . I would hear more songs
To-morrow night . . . Now go! " With thankful heart
I bowed low to the Chieftain; slowly then
I picked my way midst slumbering, snoring men;
But at my heels, at Ælla's nod, there came
Hubba and Cuthbert, sulkily enow.
Quoth Hubba surlily, " Where wouldst thou go?
A plague on thee, curst Minstrel! Haste thee then,
For we would get some supper . . . Come without! "
They caught me by the arms and drew me on . . .
I let them lead me to a wicker hut
Wherein they thrust me, and with railing words
Set in my hands a bowl of steaming broth . . .
A jug of ale . . . " By Ælla's orders, swine!
So stay here till the morning . . . If thou stir,
Or make an outcry, thou shalt shortly know
The taste of tough ox-leather newly tanned . . .
Cuthbert, get thou our rations! I bide here
Lest this new guest of ours should be inclined
To wander where he should not " . . . Said I then,
With friendly gestures handing them the gold

I had just won, " Here, lads, take this that ye
May get ye double portions . . . Ale withal . . .
The night turns chilly . . . Ye shall drink with me . . .
I have no wish to leave such kindly hosts . . .
Earl Hengest honoured me . . . See here the ring
From his own mighty arm " . . . Quoth Hubba, " So!
Thou art in favour, Minstrel, sure enow . . .
And hast a generous heart . . . If thou so wilt
We'll make a feast . . . the three of us . . . And thou
Shalt sing and tell us tales nor bear a grudge . . .
Earl Hengest's riders are good-hearted bairns,
If somewhat rough and ready now and then " . . .
Cuthbert brought ale and victuals with strong mead,
And, nothing loath, the twain began to feed,
Drinking right heavily . . . I made pretence
To drink as much as they, but, in good truth,
I ate and drank but very sparingly . . .
Then, as they lounged in lazy fashion there,
I sang them songs . . . I told them travellers' tales
As they desired me. Lastly, this I sang,
Knowing they were too drunk to mark my words . . .

" I will not ask for jewels rare, nor precious links of
gold,
Nor will I taste your dainty fare, till I my tale
unfold . . .

Drink ye mead to your need,
And may the devil, as a boon,
For the greed with which ye feed,
Ye guzzling wretches, choke ye soon! ''

Softly I sang and watched my warders drop
Their drowsy heads in drunken stupor down
Upon their breasts, until they helpless fell
Wrapped in deep tipsy slumber . . . Then I crawled
To where one snoring sleeper grunting lay,
And softly drew his knife from out his belt,
So grasping it in my right hand I crept
With stealthy steps towards the unbarred door . . .
Pushing the wicket open I crawled out
Beneath the stars . . . All now within the Camp
Seemed still and peaceful . . E'en the ban-dogs slept . .
But by the light of the great Hunter's moon
That shone down redly through a gathering mist
I spied the sentinels who kept good watch,
Pacing with steady gait their ordered round,
A ring of warriors . . . As I crouching crept
Towards the embankment, keeping in the shade,
I felt my shoulder touched . . . Without a sound
I turned to clutch mine unseen foe, to thrust
My knife into his side ere he had time
To shout a warning . . . As I seized his arm

A soft-breathed whisper reached my startled ear . . .
" Fool! Strike not . . . I'm a friend . . . 'Tis
Taliessin " . . .
He wasted no more words, but led me on
Boldly towards a gate-way of the Camp.
The warrior on guard who barred our way,
Thrusting his spear athwart the opening, stared
At both of us, then at the Briton's hand
Whereon there glittered a great golden ring,
Set with some stone I ne'er before had seen
That gave forth fire and a strange bluish light;
'Twas as a crystal clear, as diamond bright . . .
" Pass, Strangers! " said he . . . " Hengest's ring I
know . . .
I dare not stay ye . . . Yet methinks 'tis odd
That one should wear that token in this Camp
And I not know him . . . Hold! I'll call the Watch
And ask Earl Ælla's rede ere ye go forth " . . .
Said then the Briton, " Wouldst stay Hengest's spy?
I fare on his most urgent business . . .
Dar'st thou forbid me, rascal? . . . Be it so . . .
But when comes morn most surely thou shalt hang
To feed the ravens . . Thou know'st Hengest's mood . .
He loves not that we loiter . . . Shall I pass?
Or shall I seek Earl Ælla and tell him

How thou hast hindered me? " . . . The man drew back
As sullenly he said, " Go now your ways . . .
I did but do my duty stopping ye . . .
If I get blame therefor speak ye for me " . . .
Said Taliessin, " Friend, take thou Hengest's Ring,
Wherefrom bright gleameth flashing Bareketh[2]
That great Thor dropped from Asgard to this earth
Long ages since . . . 'Tis the true Thunder-stone . . .
Hengest has worn it long. Give it to him . . .
It shall be thy sure token and a pledge
That thou shalt not have blame . . Yet say no word
To Ælla or to any till the morn . . .
I am sent forth . . . Watch thou for my return . . .
One day I shall come back and in that hour
Thou shalt learn my true name, my secret power! "

We passed into the night . . . The moon was full
And yet it was not light . . . The mist increased
That dimmed her radiance, veiling now the stars . . .
Cold grew the fog-bound air . . . My guide led on
Into the blackness. Breasting a steep hill
We fared in silence till in a short space
We reached the summit and from thence climbed down

[2] Cf. Emanuel, *Diamonds and Precious Stones, p. 39.*

Into a little hollow . . . Huddled close,
Crouched in the bracken, I saw shrouded forms,
More like to ghosts than men in the thick haze,
Holding small forest ponies . . . At a sign
They mounted silently . . . I found myself
Astride my own bay mare and we rode on,
Bearing towards the north, or so I thought . . .
Said I at last to silent Taliessin
In a low whisper, unheard by his men,
" Friend, I must thank thee for thy timely help,
Else had I ne'er seen morning " . . . Said he then,
" I but repaid the gift thou gav'st of late . . .
Taliessin pays his debts " . . . Marvelling I asked,
" Where gattest thou that ring, O wily one,
That I myself saw shine on Hengest's hand? "
Said he, and laughed, " Seek not to know too much,
O Wanderer . . . I stole it from the Chief
As he slept in his berth . . . Had I so willed
I could have slain him sleeping, but not thus
Fights Taliessin the Gleaming Brow . . . I left
My dagger as a token and I came
Scatheless through all his Camp, for I am used
To play the spy and have some skill therein . . .
Men's eyes were blinded that they saw me not " . . .
Said I, and laughed, " Methinks young Katigern

Had pardoned thee if thou hadst slain the Earl" . .
Said Taliessin, "I serve not Katigern . . .
Cunetha is my Lord and he forbade
That I should take the life of Odin's kin;
For he would treat with Hengest and his men,
So would have tidings of the Saxon Camp,
And learn their dispositions and their plans . . .
That news I bring as I did promise him."
Thus talking, we fared on by devious ways
Till brake the morn, nor tarried, but rode fast . . .
The noon was come and gone ere we drew rein
To rest our horses and refresh the men . . .
Then up and on again; though none pursued,
Our leader bade us hasten . . . So we rode
Through woodland by-ways till the sun sank low . . .
Said Taliessin at last, "Seest thou yon hills?
Beyond them lies the British Camp . . . Push on,
O Wanderer! Soon surely shalt thou stand
Before Prince Katigern and tell thy tale . . .
Take heed unto thy words, for thou shalt find
The young Prince somewhat hasty in his mood . . .
Yet 'tis a generous lad and sheweth sparks
Of a fine courage in his fiery heart . . .
But he knows not how wisely to rule men,
Nor doth he trouble in his wayward mind

To please the Northern Lords . . . He flouts the rede
Of Lord Cunetha who is wise and sage,
And quarrels daily with the old Duke's sons . . .
Nor loves he Cynvarch, nor indeed his kin,
The sons of Maximus . . . Fierce jealousy
Springs up between these Lords, and much I fear
'Twill work us Britons harm . . . Prince Pascent too,
With Pabo's self-willed sons and all their crew
Are brewing mischief . . . Discontented, they
Foment rebellion 'gainst the Prince's rule . . .
Some say they treat with Hengest secretly . . .
Thus all our councils are of no avail
And we do nothing . . . Yet it seems to me
We should march out at once to meet the foe,
Nor wait the winter when no man can fight . . .
Thus urges Katigern . . . thus think I too . . .
But Lord Cunetha counsels now delay,
And he is wise, while Katigern is rash . . .
I am his man, I march but at his word
What e'er my private thoughts '' . . . So spake the Bard,
And shrugged his shoulders with impatient laugh . . .

Now o'er the hills we came, past a long wood,
Then turned our horses' heads towards the West . . .

Upon the summit of the highest mount,
Bare save for thyme-sweet turf, I saw some stones,
Huge sarsen blocks, two fallen, one erect,
Like to a ruined cromlech; and I saw
Some trace of ancient pavements, as if there
A building might have stood in olden days . . .
Said Taliessin, " That is the Dead Men's Haugh[3]
Where once the Elder Race a fortress made,
And later, in that fallen cromlech laid
A mighty King to rest . . . I knew him well . . .
By reputation," said he, as I stared . . .
For Taliessin had no great length of days
Unless his looks belied him . . . Then said he,
" His name was Bran, Bendigeid Bran[4] . . . a Lord
Who ruled this Realm which in his day was called
The Island of the Mighty . . . When he fell,
Fighting the Irish, it is told he said,
' The day is ours, won by your Leader's death . . .
Cut off my head, my warriors, ere I die,
And bear it with ye unto Lud's fair Town,
E'en unto the White Mount[5] . . . There bury it,
And turn my face towards the Land of Gaul . . .

[3] Cf. Payne, *Collect. Cantiana*, p. 84.

[4] Cf. *Mabinogion* (*Branwen, Daughter of Llyr*).

[5] The site of the Keep in the Tower of London.

Then shall this land have peace from foreign foe . . .
A long time shall ye be upon the road . . .
Aye, many years . . . For ye shall feasting go,
Rhiannon's Singing-birds' songs shall ye hear,
In Harlech shall ye stay and make good cheer,
Nor need ye haste, for know, my Head shall be
As pleasant and as joyful company
As when 'twas on my body . . . Fare ye well . . .
Obey your King's command ' . . . Then did Bran's folk
E'en as their Lord had bidden, and at last,
Coming to London, did the Head bestow
As he had told them safe 'neath the White Mount.
Since then the Britons, though at times assailed,
From their invaders never gat great harm;
Till by some evil chance the Head was found
And brought to light by that ill-fated Lord,
Maxen of Coël's Line . . . 'Tis true he had
The Head re-buried, but some say his men
In careless hurry turned the old King's face
So that no longer did it watch the Sea . . .
Since when our native land has had no peace . . .
As for his body few know where it lies . . .
But I know well . . . I saw it laid to rest . . .
Ask me not when or how, nor who I am . . .

That tell I not . . . Nor gaze with startled eyes,
For thou of all men, surely, Nornaguest . . .
Aye, Wanderer, I know thy hidden name . . .
Should not deny that unto certain men
The Fates bestow the gift of lengthened years . . .
Perchance I have that gift, or it may be
I have strange power of vision . . . On this hill
I saw Bran's body tombed in fitting state . . .
Look now how Time's rough hand has dealt with
him . . .
His bones are scattered and his House destroyed,
And therefore are we cursed " . . . In wrath he spake,
And muttered, " Know, he was mine ancestor,
So like I not to see his resting-place
Neglected and defiled . . . See, Wanderer!
Where the long-fallen stones yet line the road
Down to the vale beneath . . . Once pillars tall
That formed an avenue, now are they known
As Wardwell Hill's Grey Wethers . . as though sheep
They dot the moorland . . . Aye, this ancient hill
Guards well its secrets . . . Treasure lies below,
Men say a Dragon sits and broods thereon,
But none have found it yet . . . Come, ride we on " . . .
Then we rode West towards the setting sun
And crossed the great high-road the Romans made

That from Londinium runs to Rutupae,
Passing through Durobrivae on its way
By Durovernum leading to the coast . . .
The Saxons since have called it Watling Street
And make some use thereof . . . 'Tis a good road."

Upon a spur of rising ground I saw
The British Camp entrenched in Roman wise.
Beyond it, sheltered by a little wood
That lay to the south-west, a villa stood[5A]
Just where the land sloped upwards . . . A great place
With outbuildings and barns, more like a burgh
Than country-house it seemed unto mine eyes . . .
Hard by a fine basilica rose high,
And other buildings . . . stables and an inn . . .
Said Taliessin, " There dwells a famous man,
Old Flavius Attius, called Agricola,[5B]
Who in the Sixth at York served many years,
Then took a Civil post down in the South.
He is a Roman nobly born and bred,
Well-known throughout all Kent . . . He lately dwelt
In London City and was President
Of Southern Britain . . . Now has here retired

[5A] Cf. C. Roach Smith, *Collectanea Antiqua*, Vol. II., pp. 1-24, and Wright, *Celt, Roman and Saxon*, p. 188 *seq.*, and *Wanderings*, ch. XIV.

[5B] Cf. Roach Smith, *Illusts. Roman London*, p. 23, and p. 24/25.

To end his days in peace . . . That will not he,
Nor any of his kin . . . Here holds he Court,
For he has still some office in this place,
Which is a posting-station on the Road,
And Attius is the Senior President
For all this district . . . In his splendid house
The British Chiefs are harboured and there find
Luxurious quarters . . . Not yet Hengest comes
To spoil their rest o' nights, and Attius says
That he will never come . . . That Saxon dogs
Will soon be driven from the Kentish Land . . .
That Rome will send fresh Legions by and by.
He knoweth not, nor will he credit me
That Durovernum burns, Regulbium's ta'en,
Portus Rutupis fallen, and the rest
Of our proud forts, once deemed so firm and strong,
That guarded well the dangerous Saxon shore,
Are in great peril, lacking men and gear . . .
He will not heed my warning till he have
The sharp truth driven in by Saxon spears . . .
As he will have ere long " . . . So speaking, he
Led me towards the Villa . . . From the Camp
Some horsemen rode to meet us, challenging
With a stern cry of " Halt! Declare yourselves! "
Loud called my guide, " News from the Vale of Kent!

Ye know me, friends . . The Gleaming Brow returns! ''
Whereat cried one, '' Thrice welcome, Taliessin!
What news of Hengest? Turns he tail again? ''
Quoth Taliessin right grimly, '' Hengest comes . . .
And know, Donatus, that he leaves a trail
Of burning villages, of ruined towns,
As, far behind him like a bloody pall,
The smoky flames go rising . . . Vort'gern's town,
Fair Durovernum, is a cinder-heap,
Her belt of orchards and her pleasant trees
Are blazing yet, fanned by the rising breeze . . .
No mortal man may quench that woodland fire . . .
And all the plain around doth swim in blood . . .
Blood of our kinsfolk, shed by Saxon fiends '' . . .
At this the horsemen cursed in furious tones
And fell to muttering . . . Women who had come
To greet us heard the words and wailing ran,
Crying, '' Caer Ceint hath fallen . . We are doomed . .
Alas! The City of Swift Waters lies
Burnt by the Saxon . . . Durovernum's down!
Her circling woods are blazing to the skies . . .
Caer Ceint is conquered! Fallen, sacked and ta'en . .
Red slaughter hath o'erwhelmed her . . . All are slain!
O Gleaming Brow! Thrice cursèd be thy news!
Ill-fated surely was thy desperate ride . . .

Alas! Caer Ceint![6] Departed is thy fame . . .
Thy glory faded . . . Dead henceforth thy name . . .
Tell us at least how our dear kinsmen died? ''
'' Nay, tell us not '' . . . Shrieked one, and wailing, they
Fled from us suddenly like frightened sheep . . .
Donatus softly cursed beneath his breath,
Then rode in sullen silence.

Past the Camp
We came across a pleasant pasture-land
Unto the Villa . . . The great mansion stood
Compact of many buildings, made of flint
With layers of red tiles . . . These formed a Court,
Flanked on the fourth side by a red brick wall . . .
The upper storeys of this villa shewed,
Not brick, but timber-framed and wattle-daubed
In black and white; the sloping roofs were made
Of hollow tiles right cunningly contrived
To draw the rainfall off . . . These roofs now gleamed
A rosy red beneath the setting sun.
We rode 'neath a great archway in the wall,
And through the outer Court by gardens ringed,
Where many fountains played and statues stood

[6] Jnl. Brit. Arch. Assoc. Vol. XII., p. 35. Brent, *Canterbury in the Olden Times*; Canterbury = *Dor Avona, or Dur Whern*, i.e., City of Swift Waters. Also called Caer Ceint (Kent).

That seemed as though alive. An inner Court
Was girt by a long covered colonnade
With tessellated pavement, whence we came
To the main building . . . Here I saw large rooms
Gleaming with frescoes fittingly designed,
With glowing colours joyously bestowed,
Lighted by copper lamps hung from the roof . . .
In one I caught a glimpse of dancing nymphs
Pictured disporting gaily on the walls,
Greeting the changing seasons of the year . . .
In the great Hall, as we passed swiftly through,
I saw a fountain in the centre play,
And all the floor was with mosaic laid
In curious patterns cunningly entwined . . .
Beneath the lamp-light varying shades combined
Their pleasing tints . . . soft grey and red and cream,
With bands of black and here and there slate-blue . . .
No worse the work than folk might find in Rome . . .
Upon the lofty walls in wanton play . . .
As secutors and retiarii bold . . .
Gay Cupids mocked the Gladiators' games
With nets and tridents armed, in vizored helms;
While other laughing imps waved mighty swords,
Making a feint of fighting . . . So we came,
Gladly enough, to the south-western porch,

And thence unto the bath-rooms, heated well
By furnaces beneath . . . Here willing slaves
Took charge of my tired body, and I knew
Some hours of ease . . . but Taliessin stayed not,
For he unto his Lord must make report . . .
When I had rested slaves brought food and wine,
Daintily served, in a small ante-room,
Heated by unseen flues 'neath floor and walls . . .
Here I lay idly on a cushioned couch,
And scarcely knew myself for Nornaguest,
The Northern Minstrel, used to homely fare.

Came Taliessin and bade me follow him
Unto the Chieftains' presence . . . So we passed
Through the long covered portico and came
To that great Hall wherein the fountain played,
Here there were marble pillars, row on row,
That held up the high roof; and now I saw
That at the upper end was a wide hearth
Set in the wall, where oak-logs brightly blazed,
And sea-coal burnt thereon . . . yet more for show
Than any need thereof, for all the walls
Gave out an equal heat . . . About the hearth,
On golden couches lay the British Lords,
Or lounged in spacious easy-cushioned chairs,

So took their ease . . . drinking rich Roman wines . . .
Foaming Falernian and Cypriote . . .
And at their feet lay their great shaggy hounds,
Renowned for speed and prowess in the chace,
That still fetch money in the marts of Rome.
As I stood waiting Taliessin shewed me
Where sat Cunetha ringed by his tall sons;
White-bearded to his waist, a stately man,
Broad-shouldered, upright still, with keen dark eyes
That shewed his fiery spirit yet undimmed
By age or toil of warfare . . . By his side
Stood his young grandson Meirion, a lad
Fair, curly-haired, with merry open face,
Whose father Tybiawn had long been dead,
Slain in that war when Cuneth's sons won Wales . . .
There sat Edeyrn and Rhumawn, Osmael too . . .
And most of his great handsome stalwart sons,
A gallant body-guard for the old King . . .
Said Taliessin, " See yonder, Arwystel
Commands the guard to-day, but Keredig,
Cunetha's fifth son, here thou wilt not meet,
For he long time has served King Vortigern,
And, if he 'scaped the slaying at Stonehenge,
Now bides with him in Wales . . . There, seest thou?
Goes Llywarch Hen,[7] my friend and fellow-bard,

[7] For this and other names, cf. Loth, Mabinogion (*Index*).

And with him strolling a North British Lord,
Prince Kaw of Cwm Cawlwyd, chased by the Picts
From out his father's land, who dwells in Wales . . .
There by themselves in secret conclave sit
Pabo Post Prydein's turbulent young sons;
He never checked their wilfulness, and now
That he is old and frail they mock his rede
And run as wild as colts no man hath trained . . .
Sawyl Penuchel, arrogant and proud,
Kerwyd and Dunaut . . . Folk say all the three
Plot 'gainst Prince Katigern . . Some think that they
Do treacherously plan treason with the Jutes . . .
Dunaut has married a young Jutish girl . . .
Let them beware . . . Not e'en their noble blood
Could save them from the traitor's rods and axe
If it were proved that they betrayed their kin . . .
In that great golden chair like to a throne,
Playing at chess with our old Admiral,
Naw Gyssevin, sits one that thou must know
Is worthy in good truth to wear a Crown . . .
Owain the heir of our dead Emperor,
Maxen Guledig, come of Coël's Line . . .
Since Arbogast slew Gwythyr,[8] a young boy,

[8] Flavius Victor, eldest son of Maximus.

At Treves long since, and Constantine[9] was slain
By order of Honorius, Owain reigns
As Lord of Powys . . . And, had some their way,
He would be hailed as King of Britain's Realm . . .
But Katigern, folk say, has better claim . . .
Those handsome men who stand about his chair
Are brethren to him . . . Clydwyn, Black Anthun,
Ednyved called the Fair . . . The rest are dead
In tragic ways . . . For fated is their Line . . .
Nay, I forgot, young Peblic lives as yet . . .
Petronius,[10] so they call him overseas . . .
He went to Rome unto his father's friends,
And lives there honoured for his rank and name,
Serving the Emperor Valentinian . . .
Despite the utter downfall of his Sire,
Patrician is he and a Senator,
Has been hailed Consul twice, and thrice has he
Praetorian Prefect been of Italy . . .
Maybe he yet may wear his Father's Crown . . .
Who knows what Fate for Maxen's Line prepares?
That he aims high he doth, as yet, not own,
But his friends urge and Destiny doth call . . .

[9] Constantine the Tyrant, possibly also a son of Maximus. Cf. Vol. II., Bk. III., Canto I., p. 286.

[10] For Petronius Maximus, cf. Tillemont and Gibbon

What more he shall be to the Gods is known.
As for the other Chiefs,'' said Taliessin,
'' My tongue would fail to tell the names of all . . .
But there lies Sitric, Irish Urnach's son,
Who, if the truth be told, is half a Dane . . .
And there Lord Cynvarch and his kin prepare
To broach fresh flagons of th' Etruscan wine . . .
No Kentish vintage doth their palates suit . . .
See, March of Cornwall,[10A] Cynvarch's brother, stands
With knitted brows and twists his tight-clenched hands,
Ever distrustful even of his friends . . .
He is a Captain of the British Fleet,
But aims far higher, though he'll ne'er disclose
His secret thoughts . . . March is a wily man,
Ill to offend and wary 'gainst his foes.
There goes Lord Erbin arm in arm with him
Who wedded Gwen, Cunetha's daughter . . . He
Who is called Amlawd Guledig[10B] . . . And there . . .
That swarthy tall hard-featured stern-eyed man . . .
Walks stark Earl Gorlois with his trusty men . . .
Bretail his Steward and the Chamber-page,
Jordan the Young . . . Earl Gorlois took to wife

[10A] Later King Mark, Uncle of Sir Tristan. Cf. Loth.

[10B] Or *Anllawd*. Cf Loth, *Mabinogion*, I. 243.

Duke Amlawd's youngest daughter, fair Ygerne . . .
A fitting match, folk say, for Gorlois comes
Of noble kin . . . His sire was known to fame
As Caradoc of Cornwall, whose first son
Count Maurice, Maxen's man, died ere his prime,
Slain beyond Tweed . . . Oh! many years agone . . .
For my part liefer had I seen Ygerne,
That lovely Lady, wed a younger man
And one more kindly than yon dark-faced Earl . . .
Yet she seems happy with her little son . . .
Cador they call him . . . See! Where the boy runs
To greet his father, calling merrily . . .
His curly red-gold hair and bold blue eyes
Remind me of Count Maurice who died young
Rather than of his dark-browed scowling sire,
Who checks the laughing boy and frowns on him . . .
He fears him not . . . The child is brave and keen . . .
He'll make as gallant fighter by and by
As any of his Line . . . Minstrel! Mark there
Where comes from outpost duty one I'll name[10c]
Count Riothamer the Breton, Aldroen's son . . .
Nephew is he to dead King Constantine

[10c] *Riothamer* or *Erec.* Cf. La Borderie II., App. 2, p. 456; Freeman, *W. Europe in 5th Cent.*, pp. 164, 372; Sid. Apoll. trans. Dalton, I. p. xxxvi.

And Aurel's cousin . . . A right valiant Knight,
Though somewhat proud and quick-tempered withal . .
Budic's half-brother . . . I have heard the twain
Have little love between them . . . Budic holds
That Riothamer desires . . . Their Father's Crown . .
Nor has he gold nor gear, so he has come
To win a fortune and to seek renown
This side the sea . . . He will not stay here long,
Where's naught to gain and all too much to lose.
Budic will sure forgive what he has done . . .
His greed, his jealousy, his insolence . . .
For soft and loving is the good King's heart
As is his mother's, that sweet kindly Dame[11]
Who is Saint Germain's sister, and I vow
As saintly as the holy Bishop's self . . .
But thou art wanted . . . See, they beckon thee . . .
Lord Cynvarch calls . . . Step forward, Wanderer!
And do thine errand to Prince Katigern '' . . .

The Prince glanced at me with suspicious eyes . . .
His face was flushed . . . Cunetha had drawn nigh,
Taking a seat on Katigern's right hand.
He too looked on me with keen searching gaze,
Then whispered something in the young man's ear

[11] Cf. Haigh, A. S. Conquest, p. 225.

That I heard not . . . Said Katigern, " Say now
Who art thou, Minstrel, what thy purpose here? "
Whereat I bowed full low and told my name,
" My kindred call me Nornaguest, for I
Am friended by the Fates, but other folk
Have named me Widsith, the far Wanderer . . .
I sought Aurelius, son of Constantine,
By order of my Lord, whom thou mayst know
Dwells in the Hollow Land . . . Sigurd his name,
Son of King Sigmund slain by raiding Danes . . .
Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer he is called,
Come of the Volsung stock . . . A noble Earl
Who would make treaty with the Brython Folk
And proffers friendship . . . Gold has he enow
And a good will towards ye Western Lords . . .
He has no love for Hengest, though 'tis true
He has some friends among that Chieftain's Kin . . .
But Hengest is an exile, and men hold
That justly was he banished for his crime
Far from his home and dear-loved native land . . .
Sigurd would send ye kinsmen of his own
To help ye in your warfare, and withal
Treasure unto your need, an ye will swear
To help him likewise if he call on ye . . .
This message, Prince, I here declare to thee

Who hold high office in the Brythons' Realm;
For it appears that thou dost wear the Crown
That was dead Constantine's, while Aurel stays
Far from this land . . . As token here I bring
The golden Dragon that is Sigurd's sign . . .
I ask thee to accept it in his name " . . .

The British Prince spake with a gloomy face,
" I know not Sigurd nor his Volsung kin,
Nor want we Northern folk in Britain's Realm . . .
Too many throng here, taking as their own
What was our fathers' land . . Yet thou shalt wait . .
I will take counsel . . . Give me here thy sign . . .
A pretty gaud, forsooth! " . . . Cunetha spake,
" Prince, be advised . . . This Minstrel looks to me
A likely man to serve as messenger,
Nor is it wise to scorn this proffered aid . . .
Let crows fight crows so shall we save our corn . . .
These Northmen's feuds are salve unto our sores.
We have too many grievous mortal ills
To dare refuse to treat with Sigmund's son " . . .
But Katigern said frowning, " I know not . . .
Nor will make answer now . . . Let him stay here . . .
I'll question him at a more fitting time.
Go thou, good Minstrel . . . Yonder sit my bards . . .

Thou shalt discourse of music, harp and song
With Talliarn Cataguen and Bluchbard there . . .
To-night I speak not of thine errand here . . .
Yet ere thou goest I will question thee
Concerning Hengest's Camp and what thou saw'st
When prisoner within " . . . I told him soon
The little that I knew . . . Then he, with rage
And fiery anger moved, leapt up and cried,
" Why, see, my Lords! . . . An ye were of my mind
Long since we had marched south and met this fiend,
This Saxon devil . . . chased him to the sea
As did my brother Vortimer . . . Why stay
Waiting for troops from London and the North
While he doth burn and ravage at his will?
We've men enough . . . Do we lack courage, Sirs? "
Said then Lord Cynvarch, " Never, by my rede,
Will we march south to run into the jaws
Of Saxon Hengest . . . We'll abide him here,
And he shall fall into our cunning snare . . .
Moreover thou know'st well we have appealed
For help to Rome . . . Lord Gallio may come
And bring a Legion, trained and disciplined,
As once before[11A] . . He were a fitting man

[11A] Some time before 392 A.D. Cf. Camden's *Britannia*, p. 772; Speed, p. 279.

To guide us in these wars " . . . Cried Katigern,
" For Gallio Ravennas what care I?
Let him go hang and may his Legion drown!
Ætius made use of them for his own ends . . .
He wanted them in Gaul, and we were left
Defenceless in the lurch . . . Dost thou not see
These Romans suck us dry of gold and men?
Did not Severus[12] come to mend the Wall
When Placidus and Castius had control?
What good was it? Recalled by Stilicho,
He died upon the journey back to Rome,
And all the money that he had of us,
The goods and gear, the troops that he removed,
Were lost to us for ever . . . No, my friends!
We want no doddering foreign dotards here . . .
Too old is Gallio, nor have we time
To wait for him whose coming is not sure . . .
Let us defend ourselves and fight like men . . .
March we forthwith, drive Hengest out of Kent " . . .
Said Cynvarch gravely, " Prince, dost thou not see
Hengest designs to lure us at his will
The other side of Medway? . . . We were mad
To let him do this . . . Katigern, be ruled " . . .
Cunetha spake, " Not yet has dawned our day,

[12] Severus Æquantius. Cf. Haigh, *A. S. Conquest*, pp. 193, 198.

We must not strike too soon, so risk defeat.
The Winter comes . . . Let us await the Spring,
And more united counsels . . . I march not
Beneath the guidance of hot-headed boys,
Nor any of my men " . . . He turned away,
But other Chieftains wrangled bitterly,
And some said " Go," but more of them said
" Stay " . . .

I was forgotten . . . None asked me to sing . . .
In truth my harp I had found out of tune
In that discordant and o'er-heated air . . .
I sought my fellow-bards and long we sat
Discussing matters that concerned our art . . .

I slept but ill that night, and rose next morn
To find the whole Camp seething . . Spies rode out . .
The Villa was well guarded . . . Vigilant
The outposts and the sentries . . . Naught else done,
Save heady talking by the Chieftains there,
And grumbling 'mongst the men, who sullenly
With scornful looks and quick-flung angry words
Did the day's duties . . . Kentish Brythons swore
The Strathclyde men were favoured o'er them all . . .
The Lloegrians of East Britain said with sneers

The men of Powys were right arrant thieves . . .
The Cornishmen, and those from Devon come,
Forgot their feuds to join 'gainst Rheged men,
Whether they were of Wales, or from the Clyde,[13]
In well-armed troops come at Cunetha's call . . .
And all were jealous of their rivals' fame,
While every one who had come out of Wales,
Or from the wilds of Cumbria farther north,
Abused the Brito-Romans of the South . .

So passed the weary hours of that long day
And many others till chill Winter came . . .
Hengest stirred not . . . He had entrenched himself
Within his Camp at Ospringe, near that spot
Where I had seen the burning Villa . . . There
Had once been a small posting-town,
A *mansio*, where the relays were kept
Of well-trained horses for the Imperial Post,
And stores for troops . . . besides a little inn
Where wayfarers were wont to safely sleep . . .
Now all was burnt and gone, but Hengest's folk
Lay snug within their tents of well-cured skin
And wattled huts . . . Till in the early Spring

[13] Rheged (Reget) = A district in Carmarthenshire, also one south of the Clyde (Guaul or Mureif, i.e, the Wall District). Cf. Loth, 2nd ed., II. pp. 1-2; Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, 2nd ed., I. 153.

They once more scoured the country.

Katigern

Made futile raids to trap his wily foes,
But caught them not; scarce might he come to blows,
Yet ever found the country-side in flames,
The people slain or fled away in fear,
Till few were found to till the empty fields . . .
Some of his troops grew weary and withdrew
To their own homes . . . Yet when the Summer came
Men thought to make an end . . . Cunetha rode
Back from the Northern Marches . . . where he'd gone
To check a raid of the wild Picts and Scots . . .
And now he counselled action . . . but the Prince
Refused to ride unless the Northern Chiefs
Would make him Over-Lord . . . This would they not,
Nor would they own him King of Lloegria,
Nor march beneath his Standard.

All this time

I waited for an answer and got none . . .
I would have left the Britons' Camp, but found
My passage barred . . . Though not a prisoner
I was not free to leave the British Lines . . .
I found the time hang heavy on my hands,
But made some friends amongst the younger men.
Some days we rode unto the Medway's banks;

Crossing the bridge we spake with those who kept
Strong Durobrivae's lofty well-built walls . . .
At other times we rode to the sea-marsh,
And found the potters busy at their work[14]
As though no word of war were in the land . . .
Once too I rode to London, and found there
Much trade and business within her gates,
And many great ships sailing from her quays
To Gaul and foreign parts. I longing gazed,
Yet ne'er a chance gat I to slip away,
For young Donatus rode on my right hand,
Son of one Marius who held high command
In London City . . . A light-hearted lad . . .
In merry jest he called me his dear friend,
Bidding me sing to cheer them on the road . . .
And Anton, Maxen's son, Lord Arwystel,
His brother Edeyrn, half a dozen more
Ringed me about; so we rode on our way,
And they praised me for my gay songs and sang
In joyful chorus . . . Laughing we came back . . .
But in my heart I wearied of the Camp . . .

Still Hengest made no sign, yet spies came in
Who said they thought that ere long he would march . .

[14] Cf. Wright, *Wanderings of an Antiquary*, ch. VIII.

'Twas said that he for some months past had been
Busy in Thanet with a new-come fleet
That had brought many Jutes and German folk
From overseas to swell his mighty host . . .
More often now the Britons met the foe
And there were hard encounters . . . Men were slain
On either side . . . The Summer had come in
And it grew hot and sultry in the plain . . .
Then many grumbled in the British Camp,
Growing rebellious as the days passed on . . .
Yet still we sweltered there and naught was done.

THE TALE OF MAXIMUS.

PROLOGUE.

How Quintus Lupus, the old Centurion, began to tell his fellows the story of Maximus, while the British host awaited Hengest's Onset.

It was the sunset hour, still passing hot . . .
Some of us sat in the long corridor,
Of which the south end had been curtained off,
That looked forth on the lake . . . A pleasing spot,
Cool, quiet, restful, free from noise or glare.
Then spake young Varro, Victorinus' son . . .
Young Marcus Varro, lately come from Rome . . .
A Tribune of the Second Legion he,
Who held a post in the Imperial Guard,
Now sent at th' Emperor Valentinian's[1] word
To aid the British Chiefs, to mark beside
The natives' worth, if haply there were some
He might recruit for service overseas.
He was a young and lusty man; brown-eyed,
Red-lipped, with crown of dark-brown curling hair,
A merry smile, a careless happy air
Which charmed his friends, provoked his enemies,

[1] Valentinian III.

And, certès, was not ill-liked by the maids;
Thoughtless he seemed, and all frivolity,
Pungent his wit, though light his jesting talk;
Yet in his firm-set lips and square-cut jaw
I saw what gave his flippant mood the lie,
That seemed to promise great nobility,
And even sternness, in the years to come . . .
Right well his Tribune's dress became the youth . . .
The gilded bronze cuirass that fitted close,
Well-moulded to the body, richly chased,
Shewed 'neath his breasts two rampant he-goats stand . . .
The Capricorns, the Second Legion's badge . . .
The shoulder-straps of gleaming bronze displayed
The combat of two savage Amazons,
Who striving with Greek heroes had been quelled,
Yet in defeat fought on unto the death . . .
These metal bands did end in lions' heads . . .
From the cuirass hung plaited leathern straps,
Beneath which fringed defence the tunic fell
In folds of crimson cloth unto mid-thigh,
Bordered by gold and purple, and below
Revealed the under tunic of white silk.
Flung back his cloak of scarlet cloth, white-lined,

Gold-clasped on the right shoulder . . . Trews he wore
That came below the knees; red-tasselled boots
Of fine white leather also had he on,
Laced high above his ankles . . . brazen greaves
His well-turned calves protected . . . His great helm,
Crested and threat'ning, held he in his hand,
Having but just that moment come off guard.
He turned to the Centurion who sat
On his right hand . . . A tall, grey-bearded man,
Yet hale and hearty, and his back unbowed,
Though he would ne'er see seventy again . . .
" Tell us that tale thou promised'st us this morn,
O Quintus Lupus . . . Here have we good wine,
The best of company; what need we more,
Save some strange story of our fathers' wars,
To pass the time away till comes the dawn? "
Quintus looked at the youth suspiciously,
Though with a dawning twinkle in his eye . . .
He by his dress a Primipilus was,
Senior Centurion of First Maniple,
The Eagle's Guardian, chief Aquilifer,
Who by his rank amongst the Tribunes sat,
A more experienced man than many there.
His skin was tanned by weather and the sun,

His short-cropped grizzled hair had once been brown,
His steel-blue eyes were hard and bright and clear . . .
Just now they cloudy grew as deep he sighed . . .
" Nay . . . What have I to tell for children's ears?
I who am old and have seen many wars,
But now am worn-out as a cast-off glove . . .
New fashions are in vogue, new-fangled ways
Of fighting, so I hear . . . Ye boys despise
The old man's methods . . . Ye would mock my tale . .
I will keep silent, Tribune . . . I'll sit still
And listen to ye youngsters . . . Though may be
I still can take a watch with any man . . .
Aye . . . And lead on a charge if there be need " . . .
Spake then that young man who befriended me,
Garbed now as is an officer of Horse . . .
His leathern endraves of tough ox-hide made,
Reached half way up his calves, there met the greaves
Of polished bronze that rose unto his knees.
Gilt spurs he wore, and a long horseman's cloak
Covered his steel cuirass. In Northern way
Close-fitting leathern breeches had he on
Beneath his short green tunic: a smart lad,
With cropped black curly hair, a merry eye,
Clean-shaven as young Romans mostly are,

Though he, I think, was part of British blood . . .
Said he, " Dear Uncle, thou dost know full well
We love thy tales " . . . He flung his cloak aside,
Unlaced his cuirass and then stretched himself
In lazy fashion full length on a couch,
His steel casque hanging on its curving arm,
" Deny us not," he said, " when in the mood
Thou canst make men forget to drink their wine . . .
Marcus! I'll trouble thee for that full flask
Thou hast beside thee . . . Why, those tales of thine
Do keep us from our beds, and sooth to say
Would charm a savage Saxon's grudging ear . . .
Come, Uncle! Be not wroth . . . Wilt thou not tell
The story that I've always longed to hear
Of thy young days when Theodosius came
To Britain long ago, and Maximus
Went forth to gain the world and lost his soul? "
Said Quintus sighing, " Thou hast said right well . . .
In a wild gamble threw he and he lost;
Yet 'twas not blindly done, he knew the cost . . .
Poor Maximus! . . . I well remember him . . .
And the two Theodosii, sire and son . . .
Right gallant soldiers all . . . Ah! Those old days,
How they come back to memory . . . Then was I

Young, and right blithe and merry . . . That day when
I first joined up . . . Why . . . I was but a child
When I was trained and hardened unto war . . .
An thou wouldst hear, Donatus . . . Comrades all . . .
Come, gather closer . . . Mark an old man's tale;
Forgive him if he wanders now and then,
For those old days are very dear to him.

"Comrades all . . .
Come, gather closer . . . Mark an old man's tale."

(See page 132.)

ADVENTURE I.

How in the days of the Emperor Valentinian II. the Picts and Scots and Saxons raided Britain—How the Spanish General, Theodosius the Elder, was sent to restore order—How he landed at Richborough, marched to London and on to Colchester—How the Roman Troops marched out by the Balkerne Gate from Colchester on their way North—How the Spanish-bred Briton Maximus and young Theodosius, the General's son, rode 'neath the Eagles, and with them went the boy Quintus, son of the Provost of Colchester.[1]

Great were the troubles of the Britons then.
The Picts . . . Two tribes of them . . . burst through
the Wall.
With them came swarming Attacots and Scots . . .
Wild Saxons and fierce Northmen from the sea
Were raiding down the East Coast . . . Worst of all
Some of our own folk rose; some men as well,
Deserters from the Legions, joined the plot . . .
Duke Fullofaudes, General of the North,
Was taken prisoner in an ambuscade . . .
Murdered, men thought . . . For of him never more
Came tidings southward. Then in battle fell
Brave Nectaridus, Count of the Sea Shore.

[1] Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, Bk. XXVII.

The Emperor Valentinian[2] heard the news,
As he was hurrying on his way to Treves,
With him his son the Caesar Gratian,
Just made his Colleague, and Augustus hailed.
Forthwith in consternation he sent first
Severus, Count of the Domestic Guards,
Who was no good . . . A vain man and a fool . . .
Then came Jovinus, Master of the Horse,
Who knew his limitations, God be praised . . .
Valens Jovinus was a prudent man . . .
Forthwith Provertvides his officer
He sent post-haste unto the Court at Treves
To ask for reinforcements . . . Every day
Came messengers hot-spurring with ill news . . .
The Picts were streaming southwards unsubdued;
The Scots[3] were wasting Wales, and Saxon ships
Were landing men all down the Eastern coasts.
Then Valentinian sent us in our need
A man at last. Count Theodosius came,
Both quick to see and prompt to act. He sailed
From Gesoriacum,[3A] the great port in Gaul,
So to strong-walled Rutupae swiftly came
With his advance-guard . . . Followed in his train
War-hardened seasoned troops . . . The Legions twain

[2] Valentinian II. [3] Irish Celts. [3A] Bononia, i.e. Boulogne.

Called Jovian and Victorian, and besides
Batavians and Herulians, drawn from Rome;
With Thracian Horse and other cavalry
Of the Auxiliaries, with whom there marched,
Newly recruited from the Spanish Hills,
Five Turmae of the famed Asturians,
Who at that time were serving on the Wall . . .
These mustered, he marched straight to London Town.
There made he his headquarters, promptly thence
Pushed northwards with an overwhelming force.
Routing the straggling and marauding bands
Of booty-laden Picts, he drave them north
With heavy loss.

Now just about this time
I was a stripling barely turned fourteen,
Yet rode beside my father, who was then
Provost[4] of Camulodunum . . . Oh, well known
Was brave Secundus Lupus unto fame . . .
My mother came of the old British race,
But he was born, as I was proudly told,
In far-off Rome of a Patrician line . . .
I mind me well the day we rode to meet
The Roman reinforcements . . . Now had come
The new Pro-Prefect . . . Vicar he was styled . . .

[4] Provost = *Præpositus*, i.e. Governor.

Governor of Britain, Civilis[5] by name . . .
A just and upright, though quick-tempered man,
The friend of Theodosius, who was sent
At his request to aid him; and with him
Dulcitius was appointed, a stern man,
Harsh to his foes and haughty to his friends,
But far renowned for valour and for skill,
To be the Duke of Britain . . . These all rode
Forth from our city on that fair May morn,
Fresh from the Council held within the hour
In old King Coël's Palace near the Gate.

The scene comes back to me . . . I see them now . . .
And I can hear the great buccinae sound,
Calling th' Assembly, and the tubas deep
Make answer giving signal of advance . . .
In all their pomp, a stately band of men,
The Leaders rode from Coël's ancient town
By the great Balkerne Gateway, triple-arched,
That opens on the road that leads straight on
To London over lea and moor and wold . . .
There, wheeling to the right, they took their stand
To watch the Legions march along that way
That northwards leads by Braughing unto York.

[5] Cf. Amm. Marcell., Bk. XXVII. 8.

The walls were thronged by a shrill-chattering crowd
Of Camulodunum's anxious citizens.
A few of these were Romans born and bred,
But most had in their veins some foreign blood
Mingled with British, for they children were
Of veteran soldiers, colonists so-called . . .
Their frightened chatter very plainly shewed
Their thoughts were running on those bygone days
Of dire remembrance, when with fire and sword
Came Boudicca, th' Icenians' proud fierce Queen,
Urged by her fearful wrongs, and purged her shame
In Camulodunum's citizens' hearts' blood.
Seizing the City, she slew all within . . .
The estuary ran blood, as shewn in dreams . . .
The veteran soldiers, women, children . . . all . . .
In cruel ways she put to dreadful death,
When in her fury she did sack the town,
Which then unwalled, thus undefended, lay,
Save for an earthern rampart and a ditch.
Burnt was the Claudian Temple, great and strong,
Burnt the Old Palace and the Market-Place . . .
A ruined chester lay our glorious town . . .
But from her ashes she rose nobler yet . . .
Now her stone walls well reinforced with brick
Rise towering round the City, keeping it

Safe from her foes . . They are right tall and thick . .
Some good ten feet in width in many parts.

Now from the Balkerne Gate came marching forth
The troops of Theodosius . . . First there came
The Twentieth Legion, right well known to Fame,
Valeria Victrix, on whose standards shewed
The ' Charging Boar,' familiar to the eyes
Of Deva's[6] citizens . . . Long had these men
In that great Western stronghold stationed been . . .
Some of her Cohorts guarded yet the Wall,
Called there in haste in the emergency . . .
Now had Theodosius southward summoned them . . .
Before them rode their Legate, he whom ye
To-day would Prefect call . . . A handsome man,
Whose purple cloak of office was loose flung
Back from his shoulders, shewing the bright mail . . .
A shining cuirass of well-moulded brass,
Embossed and carved, displayed his manly form . . .
An under-tunic of red deerskin shewed
'Neath the white over-tunic, purple-fringed . . .
Titus Pomponius was the Prefect's name,[7]
Vettonianus his famed cognomen;
A noble scion of the Rufian Line,

[6] Chester. [7] Watkin, *Roman Cheshire*, p. 173.

Who rode full proudly . . . His Apparitors,[8]
His special Guard, with spears and bucklers armed,
About him marched, before him and behind;
And in their van the tall Aquilifer . . .
Diogenes, a very gallant man,[9]
Senior Centurion of the Legion he,
The Primipilus, who the Eagle bore . . .
The silver Eagle whose wide outstretched wings
Are ever to the fore where Romans fight . . .
Behind him strode the Image-Bearers on,
Who bore aloft the figures of the Gods . . .
I mean the Saints who now sit in their seats . . .
And of the Emperors, on standards raised.
Beside Pomponius rode his Vicars twain,
His officers to bear his orders forth;
On foot beside him marched his Cornet, prompt
To give the signals on his deep-toned horn.
Behind him rode the Tribunes, all of whom
Were Knights of Rome, as shewed the golden rings,
Sign of their rank, and the thin purple stripes
That edged their outer tunics . . . Their great cloaks
Were of white cloth and came down to their knees,
With golden buckles on right shoulders clasped . . .

[8] *Cf.* Josephus "Wars of the Jews," III. ch. 5, and Trajan's Column, Theodosian Column, Arch. of Constantine, etc.

[9] Cf. Earwaker, *Roman Remains . . . Chester*, p. 119.

Surrounding them there marched the Draconars,
Who the great standards of the Cohorts bore;
But eight of these the Cohorts' badges shewed,
For two were absent on the Northern Wall.
These Draconars held gilded spears, on whose
Bright jewelled points were fixed the gaping jaws
Of richly broidered dragons, made of silk
Of many colours, red and blue and gold . . .
The wind blew down their open metal jaws,
Thus filling out their bellies till they swelled,
And their curved tails waved wildly on the breeze . . .
They seemed to hiss with rage.
Behind them marched
The Legionaries clad in glittering mail,
With the long steady step that in five hours
Would bear them tireless a good twenty miles . . .
Or five and twenty, were there need thereto . . .
Their oblong shields and bright bronze helmets shone,
Reflecting far the brilliance of the sun . . .
They wore focalès, knotted neck-kerchiefs,
About their throats loose drawn by rings of steel,
Protecting 'gainst the damp raw Northern air . . .
Each man a woollen tunic wore beneath
His chain-mail lorica with metal straps
Over each shoulder pendent, and the thongs

That laced athwart their sturdy breasts were faced
With metal plates . . . These tunics of blue wool,
That kilted fell below the loricas,
Were lined with leather, and their brawny legs
Below the knees were bare to give them ease
When marching far . . . Yet the front maniples
Had brazen greaves that they at need might wear . . .
Well-armed were they . . . Within their hollow shields
Of elmwood reinforced with plates of brass
Each man five loaded javelins must bear . . .
Besides the famous *pilum* or stout pike,
He had a short *verutum*, casting spear . . .
At their right sides their good short broad-swords[10] swung,
Slung from their shoulder-belts; long knives as well
Upon their left hips from their girdles hung . . .
Now as they marched their shields suspended were
By leathern guiges hanging o'er their backs . . .
On his left shoulder each man bore his pike,
From which there dangled high o'erhead his kit . . .
A neatly corded pack that held his cloak,
And slung about it various pots and pans . . .
His water-bottle . . . Rations . . . All his gear . . .
Some men had trenching tools strapped on their backs;

[10] gladii.

Others, *immunès*, marched less cumbered, who
Had won their badges of good conduct, so
Had double rations and less work to do . . .
Each man wore *càligas* of tough ox-hide,
Hob-nailed and heavy, yet well-fitting too.
Thus shod were their Centurions, who marched
Each in his place to lead the centuries,
In their right hands the vine-staves of their rank;
And in their order came the Optios . . .
The under-officers . . . Who with long staves
Did dress the ranks. Before each century strode
A Signifer, who bore his ensign high
To serve as signal to his company.
Scant time have I to tell or ye to hear
Of all the grades amongst our army's ranks . . .
The Tesserari, who the watch-words bare
From post to post, swift trusty orderlies . . .
The Speculators, who with Stators kept,
With Drill-masters and well-trained Campigenes,
Strict discipline and order in the Camp . . .
Metators who went on before the host
Swiftly to make the Camp ere night should fall . . .
The Mensors who must measure out the ground,
Assigning quarters to the weary troops . . .
Of smiths and carpenters we had a band . . .

Fabri we called them . . . 'Neath their Prefect's hand
They mended bridges and made all our gyns,
Our siege-works and defences . . . well-skilled men . . .
Then there were volunteers, young Candidates
Aspiring to high rank . . . Duplarès too,
With double pay and rations, raised above
Munificès who must with patience toil
At every sort of arduous work, nor fail
As masons, joiners . . . Aye, and bricklayers . . .
For in those days we Roman soldiers were
Right handy men at all or any trades,
Nor shirked hard work, nor grumbled at our lot . . .
Or, if we did, took care men heard us not . . .
The Provosts of the Camp saw well to that . . .
A shirker had his rations docked, and he
Who failed in duty double watch must keep,
Or at the hands of sturdy Stators got,
Tied to the stake, stripes well laid on with rods . . .
If still rebellious, at the Surgeons' hands
Must for his foolishness submit to lose
So many ounces from his heated veins,
And helpless lie amidst his fellows' jeers;
Then weak from want of blood must do his tasks,
Deprived of pay, on scanty rations fed . . .
Oh, we kept discipline . . . I warrant you[11] . . .

[11] Cf. Stewechius, *Comm. Veget.* and Frontinus, *Strategematicon*, Bk. IV.

That ye know naught of in these pampered days . . .
Yet for those sick we had provision too;
A hospital, and surgeons highly skilled
To tend our wounds and patch our damaged limbs,
Till we were counted whole and fit for strife . . .

And music had we to enliven us . . .
Still can I hear the great buccinae boom,
Calling to arms the host . . . The tubas then
With deep and clangorous tone sound the advance . . .
The Cornicens, swift running, ready are
To give the signal when Centurions call . . .
The Liticens their loud clear bugles blow,
At whose harsh notes the cavalry ride forth . . .

Now with a long slow step there swung along
The Legions through the town; beneath the Arch
They issued from the gateway, and defiled
Along the highway past their General.
Then did their trumpets play a lively march
In anapaestic measure,[12] and the men
Raising their voices sang in chorus deep
A merry marching song . . . How ran the words?
If I remember right the soldiers sang

[12] Cf. Amm. Marcellinus, Bk. XXIV. 6 (10).

Something like this "[13] . . . He raised his voice and trolled . . .

"We must march when the trumpets we hear;
When our horns give the signal to clear
We pack up our Camp, and forward we tramp,
No lagging ye'll find . . . Not a man left behind . . .
When we march, when we march, when we march!

Oh, our throats are dried up and we parch,
The hot sun soon takes out the starch,[14]
What's the good of great fame if we all go dead lame?
But not one of us stumbles, though there are some grumbles,
As we march, as we march, as we march!

From dewy morn till falls welcome night
We shoulder our pikes and left-right,
Left-right must we tramp through rain, fog, and damp,
O'er moors covered with heather, whatever the weather,
We must march, we must march, we must march!

It's no good to be lazy or shirk,
For the man who refuses to work
Feels an Optio's stick, that's uncommonly thick,
Fall with thumping big whack on his shoulders and back,
As we march, as we march, as we march!

[13] Marching-Song of the Twentieth Legion—Valeria Victrix, c. A.D. 368.

[14] *starch* = *amylum*. Cf. Pliny "Nat. Hist." 18: 7, 28.

Oh, what joy when we meet with the foe!
With what bliss do we strike the first blow!
We form in a square, all together prepare
Our sharp pilae to hurl, with a twist and a whirl . . .
Then we charge, then we charge, then we charge!

Now our dragons and ensigns advance,
Raised aloft on the top of a lance . . .
Where the Wild Boar[15] is dashing, our short swords are clashing . . .
Where the Eagle goes flying, there men will be dying,
When we charge, when we charge, when we charge!

When the battle is over and done
Our Prefect will say ' Lads, well done! '
We'll get plenty of loot, promotion to boot,
Good wine we'll be drinking, our cannikins clinking,
As we feast, as we feast, as we feast!

From the lands of the far-away East,
From Thrace, Africa, Gaul, Spain, and Rome
Have we come and made Britain our home.
From North, South, East and West we have given our best . . .
'Tis none of our choosing if Britain we're losing . . .
We will fight, we will fight, we will fight!

Till the Picts will all wither with fright . . .

[15] Badge of the 20th Legion.

Our Legions they're shunning . . . Why! see 'em all
running
To take cover, take cover, take cover!
When they hear our busines[16] and by our machines
Are bowled over and over and over!

Oh, we march and we march and we march!
What matter if our throats do parch?
Or if we go fasting? My lads, 'tis not lasting,
For we shall win through at the last . . .

Our troubles all over and past . . .
At the last they'll be past . . . At the last . . .
Nor shall we hear calling Centurions loud bawling,
As we march, as we march, as we march! ''

After the Legion rode some troops of horse . . .
Auxiliaries drawn from many varied climes . . .
Of whom I will but tell the name of one:
A fine division six full alae[17] strong
Of Alemannian troops from north of Rhine,
Led by the young King of Bucenobants,[18]
Who held the rank of Prefect . . . Name . . . His name?
Oh, Fraomarius . . . Aye . . . A gallant lad

[16] Busines, i.e. Buccinae = great horns.
[17] Ala = regiment of cavalry.
[18] Cf. Amm. Marcell., Bk. XXIX. 4 (7).

Come of the Frankish stock . . 'Neath flame-red cloak[19]
There sparkled just a glint of ruddy gold
From gilded breast-plate shining, and below
A gleam of snow-white silken tunic shewed.
Bareheaded rode he, fair-haired, white of skin,
With jewelled circlet crowning curly locks,
His golden crested helm at saddle-bow . . .
At left side swung his sword,[19A] on back his shield,
And at his pommel hung a battle-axe . . .
The double-edged bipenna of the Franks . . .
Gaily he rode and led on his picked troops . . .
The Chiefs who bore him company were men
Right fierce and dread of aspect . . . To their thighs
Their feet and legs were cased in bristly hides,
Beneath their scale-mail loricas they shewed
Tunics of many colours to their knees.
Green mantles with red borders each man wore,
Lined with good pelts of marten or of fox;
And from their necks gold baldrics held their swords,
That were secured by buckles carved in gold,
Swinging against their mail-protected flanks.
In their hands held they barbed long-hafted spears,
And double axes at their pommels hung.

[19] Cf. Sidon. Apoll *Letters*, trans. O.M. Dalton, Vol. II., Book IV. Letter 20, c. A.D. 470.

[19A] Spatha.

Their left sides guarded were by oblong shields,
Flashing with tawny bosses of pure gold
And snowy silver borders, which did shew
Alike their wealth and that they had good taste.
Like them, though not so richly dressed, their men,
Stout fellows, rode in tunics of tough hide
Sewn thick with metal scales . . . And in their rear
Came on the siege-train[20] . . . Small balistae[21] we
Used in those days that one man well might aim . . .
These, with spare shields and spears were neatly piled,
Corded on backs of stubborn Spanish mules,
Whose drivers jerked them roughly, cursing them
When they kicked slyly, baring yellow fangs
With ears laid back, and rolling their wild eyes
In sullen sulky mood . . . Far greater gyns,
Carrobalistae, had we that were drawn
On four-wheeled platforms, running easily,
To which were also harnessed sturdy mules . . .
Nor lacked we catapults nor onagers,[22]
With scorpions to cast stones and arrows too;
And scaling ladders, rams, planks, hurdles, wheels,

[20] Cf. Pollen, *Trajan Column*, pp. 35-55; Vegetius, Bk. IV. Amm. Marcell. XXIII., Vitruvius, and Wescher, *Poliocetique des Grecs.*

[21] *Cheirobaliston* = hand-machine like an arbalest or cross-bow.

[22] "wild-asses' = large slings.

Plutei and vineæ, beams for musculi,[23]
With poles and timber for the great siege-towers,
My wondering eyes saw rolling by on wains
One carrobalista had each century . . .
To man the same eleven men were trained . . .
Each cohort had a well-made onager,
Drawn by swift horses, needing four skilled men
To work the winches, one to loose the stay,
Two practised drivers . . . Seven men all told . . .
I marked besides how waggons rumbled by
Drawn by strong oxen, loaded to the tilt
With baggage of the troops; and sumpter-beasts,
Both mules and horses, carried other gear . . .
Tent-poles and canvas, water-barrels, meat,
Wine-casks and crates of barley, corn and wheat,
Packed on their backs or borne in two-wheeled carts . .
Then came the rear-guard . . . Ah! To my young eyes
It seemed there ne'er was seen a fairer sight
Than all these men in panoply of war,
Both horse and foot . . . Now came a Legion past
That was the Second, and Augusta, called . . .
The Imperial Legion, *Fidelis* well named,
Its badge the prancing Goat or Capricorn . . .

[23] Plutei = three-wheeled sheds. Vineae = large wattle-covered sheds. Musculi = engines on rollers or wheels armed with a *falx* or strong iron hook with a covering shed.

Most of its men came from the Land of Rhine,
But in its ranks were Britons too enrolled,
And every one was Roman citizen . . .
First was it quartered in the Western Lands
At Glevum,[24] where ruled Vort'gern's royal line;
At Caerleon[25] then for many seasons stayed,
Till to Rutupae[26] it was moved that year
When Cardiff's fort was rebuilt and restored,[26A]
And native troops were set therein to guard
The estuaries of Severn and of Usk.
Now six of its best cohorts northwards marched
With all its picked men, the Vexillaries,
Who 'neath their special standards swung along;
Their term of service being nearly done,
They were exempt from duties all save one . . .
To meet the foe . . . The gallant veterans
Did not refuse that duty, be you sure . . .
This was my father's Legion . . . In his youth
He rose from out the ranks, by valour won
A Tribuneship, a thing scarce ever done . . .
When he retired, through wounds, not age, he held
The post of Provost in King Coël's Town.

[24] Gloucester. [25] Caerleon-on-Usk, near Newport.
[26] Richborough.
[26A] Antiquaries' Jnl., Vol. II. Wheeler, *Roman Cardiff*, p. 370.

The men of his old Legion, as he passed,
Gave their old comrade, late their officer,
Salute, and he responded, moved and pale . . .
Cheering, I waved my hand and called aloud,
" Would I went with ye . . . Father, can't I go?
I'm nigh fourteen . . . Let me join up to-day."
Said then the General smiling, " What says he?
He would march with us? Well, Sir, let him come . . .
A brave boy, Provost, that fine lad of thine!
He shall be comrade of mine own son here.
How sayst thou, Theodosius, wilt thou have
This little lad to train? May be 'twere best
He rode with thee and Maximus at first . . .
Methinks he is too young to march on foot . . .
" Wilt let him come, Secundus? " Said my sire
Promptly, yet with a half-reluctant smile,
" General, he's young indeed to see grim war;
Yet if the lad is keen I'll not demur,
Nor stay him from his chance . . . How sayest thou?
Wilt go, my Quintus? " Cried I, " Will I not? "
O Father, I am ready . . . I forgot . . .
I have no arms, no gear . . . My horse too small,
'Tis but a pony . . . What am I to do? "
Smiling at my flushed face, the General said,
" We will provide thee with a horse, my son;

And armour and a sword when thou hast proved
Able to wear and use them " . . . Then said he
With some rough kindness, " Look ye here, my boy!
What of thy mother and thy sisters? Come . . .
'Twere best run home to them . . . For after all
Thou art too young and tender for this war . . .
Wait thou another year " . . . But I replied,
Blushing, yet sturdily, " No, no! my Lord . . .
Thou asked me, Sir . . Go back not from thy word . .
I'll not go home lest they should force me stay . . .
'Twould wound my mother's heart to see me now
That thou hast made me soldier . . . Father, say
I will come home again an the Gods will . . .
Surely 'twill not be long . . . Bid them farewell . . .
The General calls me, Sir . . . I must be gone " . . .
Said Theodosius, " Come along, my son!
I see thou'lt not be thwarted . . . Thou shalt ride . . .
Secundus, I will bring him back to thee . . .
Maximus! To me here! Now, hark thee, Sir!
This lad is in thy charge and in my son's.
Give him a horse of thine Asturians " . . .

The youth who rode up to the General's side
Was tall and slim and dark . . . An older man
Than Theodosius' son . . . Thin-lipped, keen-eyed,
With something furtive lurking in his smile . . .

A passing shadow, may be fantasy . . .
But something seemed to spring out suddenly
From his dark face as he looked hard at me
That chilled my blood; I shivered and looked down . . .
Yet of right gallant bearing, noble air,
Was Maximus of the Asturian Horse.[27]
He bade his Liticen two motes[27A] quick sound
To give the signal for an extra horse . .
They brought a roan, a well-made sturdy beast,
Caparisoned . . . Then in a moment I
Was off my pony, and with one quick bound
Was in the saddle . . . The great beast reared high,
But I with hands and heel soothed him, and checked
Till he grew steady . . . Loud the General laughed,
Nodding his head well-pleased . . . My father smiled . .
Quoth Maximus, " So, youngster . . Thou canst ride?"
Half mockingly he spake, but with warm praise
Cried then young Theodosius, " Oh! Well done!
Gladly will I be comrade unto thee,
Thou plucky boy . . . And Maximus and I
Will soon make thee a soldier, never fear,
Ere this year's fighting ends . . Come! Ride with me . .
Hear'st not the bugles calling? March we on! "

[27] The first and second *Alae* of the Asturians were stationed on Hadrian's Wall.

[27A] mote = long note on a bugle or horn.

So marched the Roman army from the town
Of Colchester, and so I entered on
My soldier's life . . . A child . . . I was naught else . . .
As in a dream I waved a last farewell
To my dear father whom I loved so well,
Nor dared think on my mother . . . but that night
I wept a little as I tried to sleep,
Wrapt in a rough frieze cloak, in the small tent
That Theodosius shared with Maximus . . .
The General's son had gripped my shoulder hard
With friendly smile, " Come, be a man, my son!
Drink this cup of mulled wine, then go to sleep " . . .
Said he in undertone, " Faith! The boy blubs . . .
He is tired out . . . Oh, take him, Maximus,
Give him a shake-down somewhere . . . Haste thee,
man . . .
This comes of having children thrust on us . . .
I want my supper and a game of chess,
A quiet talk over a flask of wine,
Before we take the second watch to-night " . . .
'Twas Maximus who found me the warm cloak
And, with a shrug, had wrapped me in it close . . .
Now he drew near as I lay there and sobbed;
Softly he spake that none heard him but I,
" Don't take it so to heart if we seem rough,

That all seems strange, my boy . . . Soon shalt thou find
Thy level, Quintus . . . I will be thy friend
An thou dost do thy duty, little lad . . .
Don't let Theodosius hear thee sobbing thus,
Wouldst have him think thee coward the first night?
Thou art 'mongst friends . . . Wouldst run away from us?
Sleep, youngster . . . Sleep! To-morrow's sun will bring
Fresh joy in life, thy sorrows all forgot" . . .
His hand found mine and grasped it, comforting . . .
Then with a laugh he left me . . . I lay there
Happy to think in him I'd found a friend;
Yet in my heart I would that there had come
To speak thus kindly our good General's son . . .
'Twas Theodosius that I longed to serve,
He seemed a hero to my boyish eyes,
Him I admired far more than Maximus . . .
Soon I slept soundly, dreamt I won his praise,
Nor woke until our bugles hailed the morn.

Said then old Quintus yawning, "Friends, to rest!
We must be stirring early; but may be
To-morrow night ye shall hear this my tale,
An Saxon Hengest comes not to the tryst."

ADVENTURE II.

How the Roman Troops marched North—The Fight by the Ford—How Maximus received a Message from Cornwall, and how Count Theodosius unmasked a Conspiracy.

Now all that day we waited, sending scouts
To seek out news of Hengest; but they came,
Bearing no tidings of him, home at eve.
The country-side lay quiet . . . As a dream
The Saxon raid seemed past; but Katigern
Sent out yet other spies to watch the ways,
And double sentries set . . . The Chieftains all
Seemed restless and uneasy . . . Yet that night
We took our ease as much as heretofore . . .
We sat without, beneath the portico,
Those of us not on guard, or occupied
With weighty duties in the British Camp.

Namatius spake, who later had a post
Aboard a ship in Euric's Western Fleet[1]
When it patrolled, guarding the Saxon shores . . .
A quiet fellow from the south of Gaul,
Who had a country house at Oléron,
Fond of his books, yet a good fighter too,

[1] Cf. Sidon. Apoll. Letters, VIII. 6.

And a skilled seaman . . . " Come, Centurion!
Most worthy Quintus, further tell thy tale
Of Maximus, his sudden rise, quick fall,
And how he fared . . . Fain would we know the truth
As to his troubled reign, his tragic end."
Said Quintus, " Hearken, friends . . Ye shall hear all
That I have wit to tell, ye grace to hear."
I told ye how our Roman troops marched north . . .
What next? What next? . . . Oh, I remember well
We rode from York . . Ah! What a stronghold that!
Its mighty walls were like the walls of Rome . . .
Here found we the Sixth Legion . . . Part thereof . . .
For half of them were slain on the North Wall,
When Fullobaudes fell, caught in a trap[2] . . .
They say that he died hard . . . A valiant Goth,
Who, if he blundered, paid the fearful cost
Without a murmur for the sake of Rome.
At York was great commotion . . . Of a truth
Treason was rife . . . In Britain at this time
There was a man whose name was Valentine,[3]
Pannonian bred, in Valeria born,
Notorious for his intrigues and his crimes.
He was ambitious; yet had ruined all

[2] Amm. Marcell. XXVII. 8 (1).
[3] Cf. Amm. Marcell. XXVIII. 3 (4-6).

His once fair hopes by murdering, it seemed,
His City's Governor; and for this the man
Was exile sent to expiate that crime,
'Scaping with life but hardly . . . Well, to him
Came one Frontinus, exiled and disgraced,
Who had been scourged with rods for some rash words,
Some scandal 'gainst the Emperor . . . These two men
Mingled with other discontented folk,
And had contrived to form a secret plot.
This restless spirit, wicked Valentine,
Being in truth most mischievous, had crept
By some back-handed means into a post
Amongst Rome's soldiers, and had won by bribes
Some few men in the Army to his side,
With promise of still richer gifts to come . . .
The Gods alone know where he got the pelf! . . .
And all he did was in his insolence
Done as in spite of our good General,
'Gainst whom he nurtured some long festering
grudge . . .
Naught knew we of his guile . . .
Now as we lay
Encamped one night a day's march out of York,
I waited on young Maximus and bade
His Saxon slaves get supper for my Lord,

So stood to take his orders. In he came,
With Valentine, a handsome-featured man,
But crafty-looking with a cunning smile,
Garbed as a Tribune of the Thracian Foot.
They saw me not where I in shadow stood,
Screened by the heavy curtain made of skins . . .
"What then?" said Maximus, and frowned perplexed,
" What good were it? . . . Com'st thou from Conan's
self?
I'll treat with none unless I see his face " . . .
Said Valentine, and low his purring voice,
" Nay, my young Sir, but I from Maurice come . .
Maurice thy well-wisher, Duke Cradock's son,
From Cornwall ridden here in pressing haste.
He waits without; wilt see him, my young Lord? "
Maximus nodded. " I have heard of him,
An honest man enough " . . . Then Valentine
Went softly out and came again with one
Whom I knew not . . . A tall red-headed youth,
Large-boned, yet well-proportioned, high in look
As though quick-tempered, yet with cheerful face;
Clad in black samité with long riding boots
Of Cord'van leather, buckled fast with gold,
On his bare head a chaplet of red gold.

Said he, with courteous greeting, goodly words,[4]
" Hearken, O Maximus, of noble race!
Oft have I heard of thee . . . Art thou not come
Of Coël's ancient and most honoured line?
Though this from policy was hid from thee . . .
Thou art no Spaniard truly . . . though thy birth
Was in the Spanish land, though Coël's Sire
Married a Princess of Iberia . . .
Thy birth thou hast not known e'en to this day . . .
But I know thee for son of Leolin,
The nephew of the Empress Helen, who
Was daughter of King Coël, and did wed
Constantius, father of great Constantine . . .
Thy grandsire was King Coël's eldest son,
Clotri his name,[4A] and he was ta'en to Rome,
With Ceneu his young brother, 'gainst his will
By Constantine his nephew . . . There he dwelt
With his young wife and their three little sons.
His brother Ceneu was sent home again;
Still in Deheubarth his descendants reign;
But Clotri ne'er returned . . . Exiled he died . . .
His eldest son Trahern to Britain came,

[4] Cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth, ch. IX.; Wace, "*Roman de Brut.*," I. 5916-6001; Layamon, "Brut.," ed. Madden, II. pp. 58-60.

[4A] Clotri = Llwydrod i.e. Leolin. Cf. Stokvis, II., p. 221, Tab. 8.

Sent there as in contempt, for he was known
To love the Romans better than his kin.
He found his death at his own kinsfolk's hands . . .
Maybe the Emperor knew this would be so . . .
The second son Leolin secretly
Longed to escape . . . He loathed his gilded chains . .
Though honoured greatly by the Emperor's sons . . .
Young Constans made him his own Cupbearer . . .
Leolin loved not the delights of Rome,
But ever pined for his dear native land,
Though he had left her when a little child.
His gloomy air drew on him the dislike,
The dark suspicions of the Emperor,
And he was banished to Iberia;
There in the Spanish Hills to long in vain
For Britain's shores he ne'er should see again.
Then thou wert born in rock-girt Bilbilis . . .
Thy mother was a noble Roman dame
Who dwelt in exile with thy Father there
Until thy brother Marcellin was born.
Then she was made to bring ye back to Rome
To increase the rigour of thy Father's lot.
Her mother, a rich lady come from Spain,
Now brought ye up, for Leolin thy Sire
Dwelt long in exile in the Asturian land . . .

Then went thou with thy Granddam unto Spain;
Yet though thou sawest thy Sire thou knew'st him not . . .
He was forbidden to disclose his name . . .
He died when thou wert but a tiny child.
Thou and thy brother Marcellinus were
Nurtured and trained in arts of peace and war
Beneath the charge of the famed General,
The Spaniard Theodosius . . . Did ye not
Serve in his Household when in Africa?
Then, as I think, ye two were sent to Rome
To be enrolled in the Imperial Guard . . .
Thy birth is noble, neither is mine mean . . .
My father serves the King of Cornwall, who
Is called Octavius. He is frail with age,
By sickness long enfeebled. For this cause
Did our great Earls and Lords a Husting call
To choose a Regent, worthy of the hand
Of our King's daughter Helen, who is fair . . .
Indeed a lovely maid beyond compare . . .
Some of the Earls thought it were wise to wed
This Lady to her cousin, Conan named . . .
But Conan Meriadoc, a proud man,
Is not well loved in our good Cornish Land . . .
Up sprang my father Cradock in the Hall

As 'twere a lion . . . ' No! By God! ' cried he,
' Not Conan set o'er us . . . It shall not be ' . . .
Then there was noise enough, a fearful din,
Thanes shouting all together, clamouring . . .
But my Sire waved his hand and silence made . . .
Men feared him greatly, dreading his good sword
Who ne'er refused a combat . . . Then spake he
Unto the agèd King, who, propped around
By soft silk cushions, sat in his great chair :
' Awhile ago was Helen Constant's Queen,
She had a nephew, noble Leolin,
Marin his brother, dead Trahern the third . . .
Trahern was slain with wrong in this our land . . .
Have ye forgotten, Sire, with treachery
Thy sister's husband, Conan's father, slew
Trahern the King, who weened he was his friend? . . .
Listen, ye British Lords! I know a man
Worth twenty Conans ' . . . Then he spake of thee,
For he had heard good tidings of thy worth,
And those there present gave their glad assent.
Then was the King well pleased, but Conan wroth,
For odious indeed he thought the choice . . .
Thus I was sent to bring this word to thee,
And Valentine our friend has made it clear
That he can aid us, so that in short time

Thou shalt rule o'er the whole of Britain's Realm . . .
Not only Cornwall and the Western Lands,
But e'en as Constantine thou shalt be great
And hold dominion, become Emperor . . .
For Valentine has won full many hearts
Amongst the Romans . . . Aye! The Legions will
Proclaim thee Lord . . . O Maxen! Have no fear " . . .
Quoth Maximus, and troubled was his brow,
His face grown dark and gloomy . . . ' How then, Sir,
Shall I break my pledged word, my soldier's vow?
Shall I betray our noble General? . . .
Be also false unto mine Emperor?
Ruin young Gratian, who doth rule with him,
In whose guard I have served, his trusted friend? '
Said Valentine, ' What debt then owest thou
Unto young Gratian? Why, man! He's thy foe . . .
Read here the letter that I have, wherein
'Tis writ by Marcellin, thy brother's hand,
He much regrets that he must stay in Rome . . .
In terror goes he for his life and thine . . .
But lately he has heard that Gratian means
To send strict orders that thou shalt be ta'en
To Rome to answer for thy boyish pranks . . .
That gambling when on guard . . . That brawl when
thou

Struck one who mocked thee dead . . . Though long
ago
It is all brought afresh to Gratian's mind . . .
Valerius was his kinsman . . . Thou hast been
In exile ever since; and I see well
Young Theodosius doth win all men's praise
In thy despite . . . Thou art ignored, passed by . . .
He blocks thy way . . . He gains the greater fame . . .
His father is right stern and strict with thee,
He doth oppress thee "—" Nay," said Maximus,
As flushed his cheeks and sparkled his dark eyes,
" There thou dost err . . . For ever, spite my faults,
Hath Theodosius shewn me his goodwill
And I have earned his praise . . . His son and I
Are right good friends . . . I love them, Valentine " . . .
Said Maurice then, " O Maximus, I swear
No harm shall come to those who are thy friends . . .
Thou shalt advance them . . . Come at least with me
To see this Lady . . . Conan threatens war . . .
She goes in terror for her Father's life . . .
Wilt thou not help her? Now shalt thou prepare
To be our King, my Lord . . . Refuse us not."
Said Maximus, " I will consider well
Ere I make answer . . . Ye must give me time " . . .

Now the two took their leave, and I slipped thence;
Nor was I seen, for Maximus my Lord
Sat head in hands, wrapped in his sombre thoughts.
So I kept mine own counsel, much afeard;
Nor did I rightly understand their words,
Though I saw later what these things did mean.

I told ye how we Romans marched from York;[5]
And ever as we northwards fared each day
Came in the Arcani, the trained bands of spies,
To bring us news . . . Yet many of these men,
As it appeared, were traitors and told lies.
Our General knew this well and bode his time.

Now were we come unto the banks of Tees . . .
Past the old town that is Isurium[6] named,
The last burgh where we might find comfort, then
Past Cataracto[7] lying on the Swale,
A fortress strong that guards the river vale;
So by the Dere Street[8] came we on our way
Towards Corstòrpitum[9] that holds the Wall.
But ere we might Vinovia[10] reach, that lies

[5] Cf. Amm. Marcell. XXVIII. 3 (8). [6] Aldborough.
[7] Catterick. [8] Sometimes called Watling Street.
[9] Corbridge. [10] Binchester.

Athwart the junction of the Northern Ways,
Where Wear goes brawling to the Eastern Sea,
We must first pass the Tesa[11] . . . That swift stream
That springeth in the land of rocks and stones,
So, leaping down, fed full on either hand
By many becks and rills, through gorges runs
Until o'er moorland wild he winds his way,
A raging torrent rushing t'wards the sea . . .
Now at this season Tesa hostile shewed,
Swollen by floods born of the ceaseless rain
That late had swamped the country . . . All the roads,
Save our great highway raised above the plain,
Were made unsafe, and some impassable.

Still farther northwards Theodosius chased
The flying foe, and ever and anon
He caught some plundering bands strayed from the rest,
To whom he gave no quarter . . . Now at last
Came in his weary scouts and brought him word
That near at hand marched the main host of Picts,
Some Attacotti and full many Scots.[12]
Heavy with plunder went they on their way,
And from them often straggled wandering bands,

[11] R. Tees. [12] i.e., Irish.

Who raided, burnt, and slew . . . Upon their heels
Came Theodosius suddenly like flame
Just as they crossed the river . . . The stone bridge,
The fort that kept the stream, Ad Tesam called,
Captured by them when first they southwards came,
Lay burnt and ruined . . . By a narrow lane,[12A]
A hollow way between the braes led down
Unto a ford made dangerous by the floods.

Now this I saw, who then was a young boy,
Nor understood much of the art of war,
Yet had keen eyes to mark all in my ken . . .
As I rode on a baggage waggon I
Saw a wild band of horsemen cross our front,
Making towards the river . . . With sharp cries
They drave before them at their utmost speed
Loud-bellowing cattle, splashing through the mud,
Mingled with which went wretched fettered slaves
Whom they pricked on with spears and iron goads,
As they, oft stumbling, faltered on their way.
Their rear was guarded by some chariots, which
Were driven skilfully o'er the rough ground;
Wheeling, these turned to meet us . . . Darts were
hurled,

[12A] Roach Smith, Arch. Jnl. VI. 213-335.

And from a distance fighting carried on
By either side o'er the wide spreading moor,
Till Theodosius bade the Asturians charge
To cut off from their base the charioteers . . .
The Second Legion, meanwhile, marching down,
Joined battle in the valley with the foe,
Driving them on across a little ridge
Towards the flooded river . . . Many fell,
But I saw naught of that . . . With eager eyes
I gazed upon the Spanish Horsemen's charge . . .
All seemed confusion . . . Men and horses were
Drifting in fighting masses here and there . . .
Chariots, their drivers fallen, dashed along,
Borne by their frightened steeds, as panic urged,
Sideways, or headlong hurled against our ranks.
The Attacotti, some of whom had sat
Idly upon the heights above the stream
Watching the conflict, now came slipping down
To gather in our rear . . . Yet not unseen . . .
Our General sent back the Dalmatian Horse
To check this movement. Wheeling from the van
Four turmae[13] levelling spears so sharply charged
That soon the Attacotti brake and ran . . .
But now the left wing of our cavalry,

[13] Troops.

The First Asturians, scarcely kept their ground,
So fiercely fought the Picts . . . In that wild crush,
Where scattered limbs and corpses strewed the earth,
I marked the crest of Theodosius' son,
Who on that day led the Asturians,
And ever at his side fought Maximus . . .
I saw them separated from their men,
Forced back towards the swollen rushing stream,
Below, on their right hand, the hollow lane . . .
A drop of many feet from the hill's brow . . .
I saw a Scot strike at Theodosius' head
With his great axe . . . His shield, though interposed,
Might scarcely serve to ward that heavy blow . . .
Stricken he fell across his horse's neck,
Which uncontrolled, leapt madly onwards then,
And in its wild and all unguided flight
Plunged into Tesa's raging flood . . . But now,
E'en as in fear I cried aloud, there sprang
Maximus forward, spurring his great horse . . .
A mettled, well-trained black, of courage good . . .
He forced it leap into the boiling stream;
Amidst the foam-sprayed rocks he steered its course,
And by some miracle came down the flood
To where there was a deep and whirling pool . . .
Here had young Theodosius died that day,

For here his horse sank 'neath him overwhelmed,
Had not the outstretched hand of Maximus
Caught at his cloak, then gripped his bridle-arm,
So pulled him up before him on his horse,
That overburdened, sank. Then Maximus,
While all stayed gazing, whether friend or foe,
Slipt from the saddle, and with sturdy strokes
Swam alongside his charger, till with skill
And steady hand he brought him to the shore,
The farther side . . . Mounting, he drew the sword
That hung at his steed's pommel, and prepared
To sell his life as dearly as he might,
For now the Picts pounced on them . . . Scarcely I,
So great the mellay that around them pressed,
Saw what was doing . . . But our pioneers
A pontoon bridge had thrown across the stream;
And o'er it poured in ordered ranks our men.
Theodosius, our wise General, had passed o'er,
And to the rescue sent the Thracian Horse
Led by Dulcitius' self . . . With frightful cries
The Picts and Scots were flying, leaving slain
And many wounded lying on the lea,
To seek the shelter of their pathless wilds.
Our cavalry now scoured the plains and woods;
With some dismounted men and infantry,

Lightly equipped, they beat through the dense scrub,
Killing the stragglers . . . Leaping down, I ran,
Seeing the battle now was fully won,
Unto the river's brink . . . A kindly Goth,
Laughing, took me behind him on his horse,
So I came o'er the bridge, then slipping off
I made my way to where amongst the slain
Sat our brave General on his grey horse
And spake unto his son; whose dripping form,
Wild staring eyes, pale blood-streaked face disclosed
His near escape from death . . . Panting, he swayed,
Held up by the strong arm of Maximus . . .
Said then his father, " Sir, 'twas a fool's deed
To fall thus heedless headlong in yon stream;
Yet ledst thou thine Asturians none so ill,
They checked the chariot-rush as I did will . . .
Get thee to Quarters, boy! And seek thee now
The surgeons' aid . . . So . . . Help him to a horse . . .
Go, Aulus, thou . . . And Lollius Atticus . . .
See he be tended well . . . What! Is it thou,
Young Clemens Maximus, hast saved my son?
It was a gallant deed, and thou hast proved
Thyself a soldier faithful, true, and bold . . .
I marked just now how thou didst lead thy troop
When fell thy senior, Lucius Aquila . . .

Thou hast done well . . . Aye, well for thee indeed " . . .
He muttered 'tween his teeth, his face grown stern . . .
" Dulcitius, bid the Buccinators sound
The Assembly! Mount, Sirs! . . . Ride we to the
Camp " . . .
Now was it almost dark, though yet the sun
Shone red between the willows o'er the stream . . .
Our sappers had right hastily upthrown
The ramparts of the Camp, ringed by a ditch,
Upon the spur of a steep-rising bluff . . .
The coloured flags that shewed each cohort's place
Were waving in the wind . . . The tents were pitched,
And near our General's quarters was a bank
Covered with turf that as Tribunal served.
Here Theodosius, raised on high, stood up
Before the assembled soldiers . . . Quoth he then,
" I thank ye, men . . . For ye have bravely won
This victory for Rome, and Britons saved
From their own follies . . . Ye have done right well " . .
He mentioned some by name and praised their deeds .
Then spake in a stern voice, " Now must I deal
With a grave matter late come to mine ears " . . .
Men looked at one another . . . Some turned pale,
And there was buzz of talking . . . But they all
Stood quelled and silent at the General's word,

" Silence! " he said, in a cold voice and stern,
" Stand forth, Ursatius, Prefect of the Camp!
Arrest the traitors! " Came Ursatius then
With a strong guard to where the Thracians[14] stood . . .
And seized two Tribunes . . . One was Valentine . . .
Who, taken by surprise, gave up their arms.
Then brought he out of the Questorian Tent
Others already prisoners; of whom one
Was that Frontinus, who had for some fault
Been in the Forum scourged, then exile sent
From Rome not long ago . . . His eyes shewed fear . .
Valentine too stood shaking, head bowed down . . .
Said Theodosius, " These men have conspired
Amongst my soldiers even. This is clear . . .
I have the proofs . . . I know their secret plot . . .
I know whom they have tempted, and I know
Which men have fallen, which have kept aloof . . .
Dare ye deny it, wretches? " Then cried out
Valentine shrilly, in his fierce despair,
" Shew me the proofs! Who has thus lied to thee?
I am of birth far higher than thine own,
Who come of the Pannonian Royal Line . . .
How darest thou arrest me, innocent?
Shew me the proof of guilt " . . . The General said,

[14] The Thracian Cohort of Foot.

" Bring him yet nearer . . . See, O Valentine!
Dost know the hand of Conan and his seal?
These letters too in thine handwriting prove
Thou hast betrayed us . . Therefore thou must die " . .
" No! " cried the wretched man . . " No, no! I say . .
Not death for me . . . I will not die alone . . .
Why not arrest young Clemens Maximus?
He too is traitor . . . He has sold ye all " . . .
There rose an angry shout from all who heard . . .
" Not Maximus . . . A loyal soldier he " . . .
Said Theodosius, " Silence! Men of mine . . .
I know who are the traitors, who are true . . .
As for thee, Valentine, thy doom is sure . . .
And thee, Frontinus . . . Ye " . . . He named eight more . . .
" Dulcitius, Duke of Britain! To thy charge
I here commit these men . . . Put them to death! . . .
The Fustuarium[15] . . . The Army's task
It is to deal with traitors . . . Take them hence!
Give them ten minutes' grace . . . Rise, get ye gone!
Mercy I may not grant to such as ye,
Vain then your prayers . . . Remove them! " Then said he,

[15] A military punishment. Cf. Sandys' *Comp. Latin Studies*, p. 484 (745); Smith's *Dict. Gk and Rom. Antiq.*; G. Stewechius, Comment. Veget. pp. 78, 265; Frontinus, IV. I. (34).

"Stand forward! Thou who art called Maximus . . .
Say, Magnus Clemens Maximus, art thou
Prepared to take the Tribune's Oath to-day;
Thou who art but a Duplicar of Horse,[15A]
In the First Ala[16] of Asturians,
The Sixteenth Turma?[17] For thy deeds this morn
Thou shalt serve in the Second Legion, Sir,
The Third Cohort . . . Take rank as from to-day . . .
I now promote thee . . . Bear in mind, my friend,
The judgement that I gave just now, and learn
That Rome has room for all within her fold
Save traitors to the Realm . . . Thy deeds are known . . .
Thy thoughts I know not . . Choose to-night thy path;
Thou hast thy foot upon the ladder set
That may lead up to Fortune . . . I owe thee
The life of mine own son . . . I wish thee well . . .
Be loyal, Sir, and prosper . . . By the way,
Take three months' leave of absence . . . Hark ye, Sir,
Go with my leave to Cornwall . . . Is it called? . . .
Hast thou not friends there? Maurice, son of one
Who is allied unto the State of Rome . . .
Duke Caradoc, I mean . . . Well, get thee gone
With thy red-headed friend . . . I trust thee, Sir,

[15A] Duplicar = a junior officer. Cf. Domaszewski, pp. 51-53.
[16] Regiment. [17] Troop.

Aye to uphold the honour of our Rome.
Beware of Conan Meriadoc, he
Has little cause I think to be thy friend . . .
I doubt his loyalty . . . Watch him for me,
And make report as is thy duty, man . . .
No words . . . I want not thanks . . . Thy deeds shall
prove
Thine honour and thy truth, O Maximus."

Flushed and excited stood the Asturian there,
And stammered broken words, he knew not what;
But said the General then in colder tones,
" Go first to keep the field . . . Dulcitius waits . . .
Thou must attend these traitors' punishment;
Delay not, Sir! No protests, but obey! "
Reddening, the youth saluted him and went.

For my part I ran quickly to his tent . . .
E'en as I helped to pack his soldier's gear,
His scanty goods, I shudd'ring heard the sounds
Of that I dared not look on . . . I had seen
Dulcitius touch each felon with his staff
Lightly upon the shoulder . . . Then I fled . . .
It was the signal for their awful death . . .
I heard the mocking shouts and angry yells;

I heard the screams and cries of hunted men,
The rushing footsteps . . . Stumbling . . . Up again . . .
The thud of blows, the crack of whips and sticks,
Whistling of rods and thwack of cudgels . . . Till
After a long, long time the hubbub ceased;
The shrieks died down to moans, then all was still.

Maximus strode in, pale, and shaking much,
Called for some wine, and choking, drank it down . . .
" Frontinus ne'er deserved it," muttered he,
" He had already borne hard punishment . . .
Valentine . . . Yes . . . A treacherous dog . . . Who
lied . . .
Ye Gods! But what a death! Come, Quintus, speed!
I would be gone . . . Justice is done to-day
Upon the foes of Rome . . . That am not I . . .
I would exalt her . . . Would climb at her call
To better serve her . . . Aye! My star shall rise . . .
Gratian shall own I was not born his slave . . .
That traitor lied not there . . . I have borne wrongs
From Valentinian's House and insults sore . . .
Kept here an exile . . . A boy's fault, no more . . .
What if I slew Valerius? He deserved
To die who mocked my mother, cursed my Sire . . .
I had the right to meet and punish him . . .

The Emperor wrongs me, as does Gratian . . .
Insolent puppy! " . . . Mutt'ring thus he went
Forth from the tent, and southward rode in haste
With but a score of horsemen . . . With him I
Rode as his page, and oh, my heart was high!
I thought my master's fortune made, and mine.

ADVENTURE III.

How Maximus Dreamt, and of the Fulfilment of his Dream.[1]

Now as we rode, though few, well-mounted men,
Picked soldiers all, we to a valley came
Where Maurice met us, and with him his friends;
A hunting party, so at least they seemed;
Nor recked they that grim war did waste their land.
They homage did to Maximus as though
He were their king . . . He took it as his due . . .
The sun was high and burning overhead,
The August heat was fierce . . . Sleep came upon
My master as a giant on his foe . . .
His eyes were heavy, drooped his weary head.
Quoth Maurice, "Rest, my men shall guard thee, Sir."
The attendants stood, and set aloft their shields
Upon their spear-shafts lest the sun should scorch
Their future King. A gold-enamelled shield
They set beneath his head, thereon a cloak
Of purple samite, soft as Eastern silk . . .
So Maxen slept . . . And in his sleep he dreamed . . .
I, watching at his feet, saw his face moved
And troubled . . Then he smiled, and, smiling, woke . .

[1] Cf. *Mabinogion* ("*Maxen's Dream*"), (1) trad. Loth., (2) trans. Lady Guest.

"Ah, Quintus! Is it thou? Dear boy . . shalt hear.
Oh, I have dreamed a dream! A vision fair!
Most wondrous surely . . . Listen, lad o' mine!
This is the dream I saw . . . Thou see'st the stream
That winds through this green vale from out the West,
Where those great hills rise threat'ning thwart our course.
I thought I rode along the river's bank
Through the deep valley on towards its source;
And ever on each hand the high cliffs rose,
Till they towered up and blotted out the sky.
Ne'er saw I such great mountains as now soared,
Blocking my path . . . But ever as I rode
There opened out a way before my feet,
A steep way and a strait, yet up I climbed . . .
My good horse bare me on with wingèd feet
Until I reached the highest mountain's crest.
Ah! What a heavenly sight before me lay!
The fairest plain that ever mortal saw
Lay stretched before me . . . Endlessly it stretched,
A smiling land of cornfields, woods, and meads,
Where rivers great and broad rolled stately on
From out the mountains flowing to the sea.
Far in the distant blue I saw a haze,
And knew that there I should the ocean find

To which the rivers journeyed. To the mouths
Of these great streams I thought I took my way.
I rode along the flower-besprinkled meads
Until I came unto the gaping gulf
Of sure the largest river I have seen;
And at its entrance a great city stood;
Therein a huge tall castle, which I saw
Was garnished with vast battlemented towers
Of varied colours. In the harbour lay
A mighty fleet, the greatest I'd e'er seen . . .
More ships therein than lie in th' Ictian Bay . . .
But one ship there was larger than the rest,
And fairer than her fellows . . . All her hull
That lay above the water was thus made . . .
One plank was gilt, the next was silvered o'er.
A wondrous bridge stretched to her from the quay;
A bridge made from the backbone of a whale.
I, coming thither, leapt from off my horse
And led him in this ship . . . I saw no man . . .
But, lo! When come aboard, some ghostly hands,
Invisible, intangible, unheard,
Hoisted the mainsail, and we sailed the seas . . .
How long I know not, but at length I came
Borne by a gentle breeze unto an isle,
The fairest and most lovely in the world . . .

I landed there . . . On foot I roamed at will,
Crossing the island e'en from sea to sea,
Until I came unto its farthest shore.
Valleys I saw, and steeps, and wondrous rocks;
Huge rugged precipices that dropped sheer down
Into such depths I dared not look below,
So much my heart misgave me suddenly;
And sullen rivers in deep channels flowed,
Scarce seen, scarce heard, with far-off moaning sound
To join the sea, whose booming now I heard . . .
Ne'er have I seen the like . . . From a high cliff,
Washed by the wine-dark purple sea, I saw,
Lifting mine eyes from this land cleft by streams,
Another island o'er the narrow sea . . .
But on my right a mighty mountain rose,
And at my feet was stretched a wide-flung plain . . .
As wide as was the strait that lay between
The lesser isle and that I stood upon . . .
And from the plain rose woods that covered all
The lofty hill's great flanks as with a robe.
From out the mountain's side a river flowed
Through that fair pleasant plain unto the sea;
And at its mouth a castle I beheld
Far fairer than the first. Then I went down,
And found the gate thereof stood open wide,

"Over against me I saw two young lads, who played at chess.
. . . Beyond these pretty boys,
An old grey-headed man in a great chair . . .
He carved out chessmen. Watching him there sat
A maiden fairer than the sun in May."

(See page 185.)

Nor guard, nor janitor there barred my way,
So I went in. I passed through the wide Court,
And entered a great Hall, whose roof appeared
To be made of red gold, the walls thereof
Seemed fashioned all of rich bright glittering gems,
The doors were massy gold . . . Gold seats I saw,
And tables of pure silver . . . On a bench
Over against me I saw two young lads,
Fair-faced and auburn-haired, who played at chess . . .
I saw they used a fine-made silver board
Whereon stood golden chessmen . . . The lads' dress
Was of rich jet-black satin, chaplets bright
Of ruddy gold confined their curly hair,
Whereon were jewels, sparkling rich and rare . . .
Rubies of price and gems of every kind;
No better than these has the Emperor . . .
Their feet were shod in buskins that were made
Of fine new Cord'van leather, held in place
By golden slides. Beyond these pretty boys,
Beside a pillar in this Hall there sat
An old grey-headed man in a great chair
Of ivory fashioned; on the back thereof
Were set two eagles' figures carved in gold.
Bracelets of gold he wore upon his arms,
And many rings he had upon his hands,

A gold torque round his neck, and bound his hair
With golden diadem . . . He was a man
Mighty to look on . . . Now before him lay
A chessboard all of gold, and in his hand
A golden rod, from which with sharp steel file
He carved out chessmen. Watching him there sat
A maiden fairer than the sun in May . . .
O Quintus! Easier surely had it been
To look with unveiled eye upon the sun
In all his dazzling splendour, than to gaze
Upon that Lady's spotless loveliness . . .
Yet I took courage, lad, and raised mine eyes,
Filling them with her beauty . . . Ask me not
To tell thee what her features meant to me . . .
She was the vision that my heart desired,
The one and only maid I'll ever love . . .
Upon her was a vest of soft white silk,
Clasped o'er her rounded breasts with purest gold,
O'er that a surcoat of some filmy stuff . . .
Gold tissue seemed it . . . And on her white brow
A frontlet of red gold set with rich gems:
Rubies, alternate mixed with pearls and stones
That none but Empresses by law may wear.
Her little waist was girdled by fine gold,
Truly she should be Empress of the World!

She was the fairest sight man e'er beheld . . .
As I drew near with faltering steps, amazed,
The maid rose up and came to greet me there;
And at the sight hot love my courage spurred
That I went boldly to my sweet and flung
Mine arms about her neck . . . Thus, I have heard,
Amongst the Celts men courteous greet their friends . .
Nor did she shew resentment, nor spake aught,
But smiling led me to the golden chair
And motioned me to sit . . . When I obeyed
Then she sat down beside me . . . The great chair
Had room enough, I warrant, for us both . . .
So had I still mine arms about her neck,
My cheek laid close to her cheek . . . When, behold!
The hounds that chafed as they were held in leash,
The shafts of spears that 'gainst each other beat
As sleepy knaves did drop them passing by,
The neighing horses' stamping restless feet,
Combined to rouse me, and alas! I woke . . .
Now have I no more spirit left in me
Because of that dear maid I saw in sleep . . .
For, oh! The love of her my being fills . . .
Without her, Quintus, surely I shall die '' . . .
My Master Maximus sighed deep and groaned;
I knew not what say. That moment came

Some of the household of Lord Maurice there . . .
" Sir ! " said the Butler, " Is not the hour past
When thou dost dine ? . . . The board is laid, my
Lord " . . .
Then Maurice brought him to his silken tent
And they lay at the board; but never man
Was sadder than my Master did appear;
And as we journeyed heavy was his cheer
For a week's space. When men would drink good wine
Or mead from golden vessels, not so he . . .
If they would hearken unto merry tales,
Or list a song, he went not with them there;
Nor could we humour him or bend his will
To do aught else but sleep . . . For he told me
That then he saw the maiden of his heart,
But waking he saw naught, nor knew he where
In all the world this Lady he might find.
At last came Maurice to him, who did take
The part of Chamberlain . . . Though highly born,
A Count and a Duke's son, he served my Lord,
Who was but a poor officer of Horse,
As though he were his Emperor, none less . . .
" Lord," said he then to dreaming Maximus,
" My people all revile thee "—" Wherefore so ? "
Said Maximus, still sleepy, but amazed . . .

" Because thou seemest as a man who dreams
His life away wrapt in strange fantasies.
They get from thee nor word nor answer meet
As men should have from one who is their Lord . . .
They like it not, nor I . . . Art thou the man
Who shall face Conan and rule all the world?
O Maxen, rouse thee . . . Wake, my dearest Lord! "
Then said full wearily the love-wrought man,
" Sit down and hear why I am sorrowful " . . .
He told his tale to Maurice, hiding naught . . .
Who, when he heard, sat still awhile in thought,
Then smiling spake, " Shall I now read thy dream? "
Seeing my Master nod he softly said,
" As thou didst ride unto the river's mouth,
So ride we now along that very stream . . .
Thou climbedst over mighty mountain peaks,
E'en so shalt thou climb high nor fear to fall . . .
But at the end thou camest to a Hall
And saw a maiden and two youths within . . .
Oh, I know well those lads that played at chess,
That ancient man from thy description guess . . .
The maiden, too, no stranger is, I ween . . .
Though how thou sawest them I cannot say;
It is some magic of the Elder Gods,
Who yet have power to work us good or ill.

Surely this vision is a gracious one,
Nor doth betoken harm . . . It can but mean
That thou shalt wed the maiden of thy dream
And with her rule the World, mine Emperor.
Trust me, dear Lord, and I will guide thee home
O'er stream and hill, until at last we come
To that place where I know that thou shalt find
This maiden dear to thee . . . For I do guess
Her name, her kindred, and her royal race."
Said Maximus, " It may be as thou sayest;
Lead on, then, Maurice; be thou faithful guide,
For I do trust thee, friend " . . He strove to smile . .
Our trumpets blew to horse, and we fared on.

So rode we till to North Wales we were come,
For at this time King Eudav had gone forth
From Cornwall north, and lay in Arvon's land.
Cried Maximus, as he saw rising high
Eryri's slopes,[2] that mounted to the sky,
And o'er the sea spied Mona's silvery isle,
" I know this place . . . See, yonder where there stands
The Castle of my dreams . . . Oh, does it hold
The maiden whom I love? " Said Maurice then,
And laughed a little, " That is Aber Sain;[3]

[2] Snowdon. [3] Carnarvon (the old castle).

Sure, Sir, the strongest castle in the world,
And doth hold a great treasure " . . . So we rode
Into the Castle-Court, then in the Hall;
Dismounting there, we saw the lads play chess;
The sons of Eudav by his concubine,
Kynan and Adeon, two handsome boys;
And there sat raised in his great ivory chair
The frail old man, who yet was a great King,
Carving his chessmen out of purest gold . . .
There sat the lovely maiden of his dream;
Slim, tall, and graceful as a fawn she seemed,
A wild thing of the woods . . . Her dark blue eyes
Looked on him sparkling, questioning yet shy,
Her lips were curved in a provoking smile . . .
Then Maximus sprang forward, " Hail! " he cried,
" Empress of Rome, all hail! " And round her neck
He flung his arms with ardour . . . Sweetly she
Greeted the Roman soldier, " Welcome, Lord!
Thrice welcome art thou to my side, for thou
Sure will protect us from Black Conan's guile . . .
Thou wilt not let him part me from my Sire . . .
In thy strong arms I feel so safe, fair Lord,
Protect me always . . . Leave me never more " . . .
Whereat he smiled, and his dark face grew kind,
" I love thee, Helen . . . Thou shalt be my bride . . .

Give me the right to fight for thee, sweet child."
He sat beside her in the golden chair,
And his cheek touched her cheek as in his dream . . .

That night they wedded . . . That night fled in wrath
Black Conan Meriadoc and took ship
To Ireland o'er the sea, there stayed a while,
Plotting grim mischief against Britain's Isle.

ADVENTURE IV.

How Maximus and young Theodosius were sent North to keep Hadrian's Wall—How Maximus took order with the Troops—How Marius of the Asturians and Publius of the Tungrians fell into disgrace thereby, and what happened.

Would ye hear more? How Maxen left the side
Of his fair Princess for the Northern Wars?
Of how he won renown and was set high?
Some part I'll tell ye; but of the Welsh raids
I will say little, save that Conan came
Full many a time and oft with sword and flame
From Ireland's coast to ravage the Welsh shores;
And ever Maximus defeated him,
And drave him back unto his ships again;
So that my Lord won honour . . . He, much shame.

About this time old King Octavius died,
And in his stead the Brythons chose as Queen
His daughter Helen. Then did Maximus
Hold rule o'er Wales and Cornwall in her name,
The land of Powys was his own domain,[1]
And the Welsh March he bravely kept for Rome.

I rode with Maximus when he was sent

[1] Cf. Sayce, *Arch. Cambrensis*, Series VI., Vol. IX. (1), p. 47 (19).

With Theodosius' son to keep the Wall . . .
How can I tell ye of that marvel, Sirs?
Though some of ye have seen it . . . It is now
But a pale shadow of its former self
And crumbleth daily . . . Yet it still doth rise
In places towering to the very skies,
Keeping the wild and roving Picts at bay;
Who, like the murmuring seas' devouring waves,
Sweep round its base and eat its stones away,
But as yet find no foothold on its crest.
Even in my day it had changed from when
In its first glorious grandeur it shone bright,
Fresh from the chisels and the moulding-tools
Of Hadrian's Legions . . 'Twas they built this Wall . .
For later rose the Wall of Antonine;
But that was made of turf and earthen banks,
Strengthened in places by great rocks rough-hewn . . .
The Wall of Hadrian is of mortared stone.
Where Nero's General, wise Agricola,
Had set his chain of forts, here stands our Wall.
A little to the north of those old burghs,
From Wallsend[2] on the Tyne it stretches on
To far Bowness that on the Solway lies;
A mighty barrier, ditchèd on the North;

[2] Segedunum.

Southward the earthern Vallum guards its rear . . .
Built first, found wanting, and thus reinforced . . .
And all along its course stand stations strong,
Watch-towers and turrets that well keep the Wall.
Two good broad roads are there on the south side . . .
North of the earthwork one, the other south . . .
That troops may march in comfort speedily,
And stores be brought as needed to our men.
This lofty bulwark, twenty feet in height,
Eight feet in breadth, was reared by the great skill
And arduous toil of legionaries' hands . . .
Men, who for all their martial pride and fame,
Disdained not manual labour . . . Then came North
Detachments[3] from the Sixth that lay at York;
The Twentieth from Chester sent her share;
The Second, quartered at Caerleon, spared
Her most skilled workmen. Surely ye may see,
By their inscriptions carved upon the stones,
How all of these combined to build the Wall.

I mind me well of my first sight thereof . . .
It was a glorious crisp October day;
The keen breeze whistled o'er the whin-clad moor;
The dark-hued spongy heather glistening shone

[3] Numeri.

Wet with the morning dew. Bleak pastures bare,
With scanty close-cropt herbage sparsely sown,
Stretched on for miles on either hand, and shewed
Studded with grim grey boulders, lichen-stained
That some deep orange, or red-capped, appeared.
The white road northwards like a ribband waved
Along the treeless valley . . . Here and there
Wide-sprinkled lay some farm-house of dark stone . . .
A cottar's hut of turf . . . A few white sheep
Dotted the heath . . . A herd of small hill kine,
Over the uplands scattering, wandered far;
Their distant bells, low tinkling, reached mine ear,
Clear, soft and sweet, borne on the morning air.
The upland brake and fell before mine eyes
Abruptly to the plain, a rugged mass
Of whinstone cliffs precipitously hurled . . .
As though we came unto Earth's farthest edge
Where giants in their play those great crags whirled . .
Then left them lying in confusion piled,
As children, tired of play, will leave their toys . . .
On the far side, upon the perilous brink
Of that scarred ridge which curving rose and fell,
The dark thread of the Wall unravelling sped
On its unswerving and remorseless course . . .
As though a giant's hand dragged it across

From sea to sea and spun a far-flung web . . .
Nor did it falter, nor refuse to climb
The highest hills, but o'er them forced its way
Boldly, nor flinched; and from their peaks dropped down
Into the gaps below . . . drear dark ravines . . .
Then tireless breasted the steep heights beyond,
Until it vanished in the shimmering haze
That to the East veiled the fresh-risen sun . . .
But in his reborn splendour Helios came,
Bursting the strangling fetters of the mist,
Gilding the hill crests with his golden light,
Touching the turret-tips with rose-red sparks,
Till all the Wall's top gleamed as though aflame,
And its white bastions flung back dazzling rays . .
Yet in the deeper vales the dark shades still
Marked the long curvings of the snake-like Wall,
That dragged its undulating length along
The wold and valley, heathy moor and hill.

Around us was a silence undisturbed,
Scarce broken by the cry of some sea-bird
That coastward winged its way as brake the morn.
Amid this solitude and silence we
Marched on for endless miles, it seemed to me . . .

The clatter of our horses' hooves was quenched
In the soft moss, but on the hard white road
Our Legions' tramp like distant thunder rolled.
South of us lay the desolate moor and wold,
North on the sky-line rose the mighty Wall . . .
Our cohorts marched at ease; each man had slung
His helmet o'er right breast; so swung along
With the drilled legionary's practised stride.
From shouldered pike his corded kit hung down;
Upon his back rested his oblong shield;
His hobnailed boots clip-clopped along the road.
The troops of Horse rode on at a foot-pace
In wide extended order cautiously . . .
At a Decurion's command at times
A rider gallopped o'er the springy turf
Bringing some message rearward from the van;
Or, spurring hard, urged his steed to the front.

'Twas at Corstòrpitum we crossed South Tyne . . .
A strong-walled town that held barns stocked with corn . . .
We left our Rear-guard here to bring in stores.
Quitting the Dere Street for the Western Way,
Thenceforth we marched along this stone-paved road,
That ran a level course south of the Wall,

Until we reached the bank of Northern Tyne,
That, at this season, rusheth down amain,
Brawling in wrath, to meet the Southern Stream . . .
Here we turned northwards. Still the tawny moor
Like a great sea stretched undulating; still
The autumn gorse shewed green picked out with gold.
The cowberries white and red displayed their fruit
By the roadside, that grasping hands might clutch
And thirsty mouths refresh them with their juice.
From out the faded heather here and there
A lingering knapweed, or the spikenard starred,
Shewed their late blossoms, and white bryony,
In graceful twisted tendrils, drooped great wealth
Of scarlet berries that like rubies glowed.
Queer monstrous toadstools, speckled white and red,
Or gorgeous orange, peered from ditches out.
The grey-green stone-crop rosy-tinged lay thick,
A spongy carpet spreading o'er the moor,
Soft, and yet springy, 'neath the horses' tread,
The bronze-tinged brittle stalks of tansies dead
Vied with the dying bracken's golden shades;
With creeping willow mingled milky spurge,
And sphagnum moss, and tufts of coarse mat-grass,
From which peeped nodding harebells wistfully . . .
As though they knew their fragile lives must soon

Perish beneath cold winter's cruel blast,
Yet though they died would blossom to the last . . .
And all around grew green-ribbed sedges tall,
Strayed here from woods or bogs. Here junipers,
Dwarfed by the north-east winds, reared stumpy
heads . . .
And crimson wreaths of brambles, intertwined
With trailing dodder, clung about the gorse.
In brakes the tawny gold-brown bracken rose
From sheltered hollows six feet high or more . . .
But, for the greater part, the moor was bare
And very desolate . . . So we marched on,
Crossing the surging Tyne at set of sun
By a strong guarded bridge and covered way;
Then, as our trumpets played a lively air,
We drew nigh to the Wall, that frowning shewed
Dark 'gainst the evening primrose of the sky;
And it grew very cold . . . At last we heard
A summoning trumpet hail us from the Wall,
Whereat the bugles of our Horse replied;
Their harsh yet cheerful notes pealed joyfully,
And our horns blared in chorus . . . Then we saw
An earthwork looming black from out the mist
That from the steaming ground beneath our feet
Rose thick and fast . . The sun had set, 'twas dusk . .

Beyond the Vallum, 'tween us and the Wall,
Rose up a tangled mass that seemed a town
Of ugly grey stone houses, grim and square;
And on the outskirts were pitched shabby tents,
With huddled wooden huts mixt here and there;
These at the Wall's base stretched on endlessly
On either hand till lost in murky gloom[3A] . . .
And now the squalor of a barrack town,
The noisy tumult, sights and scenes and smells
Of a Canuba came before our eyes,
Our ears, our noses . . . Deep I sighed as snow
Fell heavily . . . And grumbling all we came
Within the heavy shadow of the Wall,
Which swallowed us as we rode slowly in,
Muffled in our great riding cloaks, and glum . . .
Behind us tramping, tramping noisily,
The legionaries, weary from the march,
Heard joyfully enough the welcome call
That from the busines' deep-toned throats did sound,
Echoed by shouts of the Centurions . . .
Then high and clear the voice of Maximus . . .
" Halt, troops! . . . The roll-call . . . Horns! Sound
the dismiss!
To quarters all! . . . Each man to his own place! "

[3A] Cf. Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (On the Great Wall).

I marked with sleepy eyes the sentries pace
The battlemented rampart of the Wall;
I saw them shiver in the bleak north wind
That beat upon them, howling, from the wold,
And drave into their faces blinding sleet . . .
Some of them fresh may be from southern Spain
Or sunny Italy . . . I heard one curse,
Crouching behind the breast-high parapet,
As with a shudder he his hasta[3B] clanged
Sharply, in sullen anger, on the stone,
" Apollo blast this land of fog and snow
And Pluto roast the ill-advisèd fools
Who built this vile . . . This thrice accursèd Wall!
What good is it to any man at all?
Better the Picts than this infernal cold . . .
My malison on our soft officers
Who lie in comfort drinking at their ease,
While we poor devils shiver here and freeze! "
Whereat quoth Maximus, who overheard
As he patrolled the Wall fresh from the road,
" How, friend? Wouldst grumble? True, the air is
fresh . . .
When thou'rt relieved report thyself, my man,
To the First Optio of thy Century,

[3B] Spear.

Who'll take thee 'fore the Prefect of the Camp,
And thou shalt get what will keep out the cold " . . .
The sentinel, saluting, shivered still;
His pale face shewing troubled in the gleam
Of the guards' lanterns that were turned on him.
He muttered humbly, " Sir, have me excused . . .
I meant no harm . . . Sir, give me double guard . . .
But not the forks, Sir . . . Not the shameful rods " . . .
Maximus laughed outright . . . Then quickly said,
" Nay! Not the drubbing that thou dost deserve,
Fear not this time . . . I will excuse thee . . . So
Thou shalt have but a good hot cup of wine
To put some heart in thee and clear thy head . . .
Thou'lt not beg off that surely? Now begone!
Give me thy spear . . . thy shield . . . And so, dismiss!
I'll keep thy watch for thee . . . Thou art too soft! "
Then all the soldiers standing round loud laughed
And mocked their fellow, as ashamed, head down,
He slouched away . . . But Maximus stood there
On guard for full two hours, while Lucian went
In his stead on the rounds and made report . . .

Theodosius shrugged his shoulders when he heard,
" Thy way, not mine, my colleague " . . . Then he
laughed,

" Dost thou mean thus to win the soldiers' hearts?
Beware lest they but mock thee, Maximus."
Said then my master hotly, " I care not . . .
I would but shew the knaves that I shirked not . . .
They like me well enough, but thou know'st well
'Tis thee, not me, they love; though thou dost naught
Save shew them sternness, Theodosius."
The soldiers truly liked my master well,
And the Auxiliaries all swore by him . . .

We were a motley crew upon the Wall . . .
'Twas garrisoned, ye know, by cohorts drawn
From every part of Rome's great Empire, some
Were Gauls, Dalmatians, Dacians; some from Rome,
Sicilians others, Moors, Batavians;
Men from the East, slim swarthy Syrians swarmed;
Others were Spaniards, some brought from the South,
But most Asturians, tough mountaineers
From northern Spain, well hardened unto war.[4]
Here came their cohorts and their alae; here,
Dispersed along the Stations on the Wall,
They manned the towers and turrets twice a day.
They lived and died, were buried 'neath the Wall,

[4] Cf. *Notitia Dignitatum*, ed. Böcking: also ed. Seeck, and Bruce, *Hdbk. to Roman Wall.*

And here their children kept their names alive . . .
Aye, and their children's children. Ten score years
And even longer, as their records shew,
The Asturian Horse, the Second Ala, stayed
Stationed at Chesters, then Cilurnum called . . .
New blood from all the Provinces came in
From time to time. Here also bravely served
The native Britons, grudging not their lives . . .
So for Imperial Rome we held the Wall . . .
Not easily nor lightly . . . Many a time
In later days the Wall was breached and through
Streamed hairy Picts and Caledonians wild,
Aye, and the Irish Scots and Northmen too . . .
Yet ever by our desperate deeds we kept
The savage dogs at bay . . . Some Picts we won
To be our friends . . . The little villains came,
Their sharp eyes keen, their chattering tongues agog,
To make their bargains . . . How they cheated us!
They sold us shaggy ponies, well-bred hounds,
Pelts of wild beasts . . . bears, wolves and mountain
elks . . .
Making good profit . . . Sold their fellows' hides
For lust of gold, betrayed them . . . worked as spies . . .
Oh, I loved not the wily dwarfish knaves . . .
Yet some were not so bad who shewed us sport,

Leading us by their boggy heaths and dales,
Over the mountains, in their secret caves,
By tarn and fell and moorland to the waves
That beat upon the rock-bound northern shores . . .
Ultima Thulè . . . So that land we named . . .
Ah! Those were days indeed . . . Happy enough,
Filled with the joy of life was Maximus,
His friend Theodosius ever by his side,
Chasing the elks and aurochs in the wilds,
Or hunting wolves to pass the winter days.
O' nights we gathered in the central room
Of our young Tribunes' quarters, snug and warm,
Heated by flues inside the walls,[5] with glass
Set in the windows . . . Aye, they fared not ill . . .
Yet would they leave their comfort and go keep
Watch with the sentries on the roughest nights
If they thought there were need . . . Cilurnum stands,
As ye may know, the centre station set
Where northern Tyne flows south and breaks the Wall.
Six Gateways had it in the olden days,
Four double-arched, and two just sally-ports.
Now only two are left, the rest built up
As more convenient for small garrisons . . .

Some nights we had our hands full . . . Black as pitch

[5] Cf. Bruce, *Hdbk. to Roman Wall*, 8th ed., p. 104.

The darkness fell on both sides of the Wall,
When a North-easter shrieked and whined,
Whistling about our ears and chilling us . . .
Then through the blackness of the stormy night
We thought our eyes saw glimmering creeping sparks;
And muffled sounds were borne upon the blast,
Scarce heard ere stifled; till our bemused ears
We'd swear had traitors turned; but softly crept
The tiny folk about our massive Wall,
And, ere we knew, had scaled the bastions,
With their rope-ladders fixed right cunningly,
Beneath our very noses . . . Then a swarm
Like hornets swooped all buzzing horribly,
Armed with curved hooks and strange-shaped scythe-
like blades,
In number as the sand on the sea-shore . . .
What with the darkness and the awful dread
Of unknown terrors rising from the void,
We had hard work at times to beat them back . . .
We could not work the catapults o' nights,
Nor the balistae, nor our other gyns;
Nor use our bows, though we had archers skilled . . .
Oh, ye know well enough how the Picts fight;
Nigh naked, painted with strange stripes and signs,
Fearing not death nor devil; and, in truth,

They are akin to the foul fiend himself,
And die like maddened wolves caught in a trap
When worsted in a struggle . . . So we fought
In the dense darkness, scared, yet smiting hard
The painted yelling demons; and next morn
Maximus oft would blame, Theodosius scorn,
Our cohorts for their slackness . . . Those men proved
To have failed in the fight by giving ground
Our Prefect punished by a shameful death . . .
Tied to the forks they died beneath the rods;
Or else, degraded, broken, were cast forth
To seek for mercy from the savage Picts,
Who tortured them to death . . . To those who shewed
A gallant heart and steadfast bore themselves
Maximus gave much honour and rewards,
And did promote them; so was he well loved
By those whose love he craved . . By all brave souls . .
But we were sorely hampered . . . Few our troops . . .
None of our cohorts had their ranks quite full,
Some were mere skeletons . . . So Maximus
Reluctantly gave orders that the gates
Must straitened be that look towards the North,
And many closed . . . This gave us some relief,
And we worked hard to block the arches up;
But all this time must guard us from attack,

Not only from the Picts, but Irish Scots,
Fierce Attacotti, who their prisoners cooked
And relished for their dinners . . . and besides,
The Northmen raided us from overseas . . .
The Saxon pirates, joined with thievish Danes,
And men from Scandia, troubled much our peace.
The Saxon is the worst and fiercest foe;[6]
Each of their oarsmen is a pirate bred;
Captains and crews alike, they one and all
Are brigands born, or learning to be thieves.
They sudden strike when men think they have fled,
Resistance does but move them to contempt,
Rash courage naught avails against their strength.
When Saxons chase they catch, but when they fly
No man may overtake them, such their skill,
So handy are they when they sail their skiffs.
Shipwrecks no terror for the Saxons hold,
They count them but as useful training schools . . .
The perils of the sea make them more bold . . .
No mere acquaintance have they with the deep,
They know the sea e'en as they know themselves.
A storm rejoices them because they hope
Thereby their enemies to catch off guard;
And in bad weather they find a sure screen

[6] Cf. Sidon. Apollon., Book VIII., Letter 6.

To hide their preparations for assault.
So that they trap their foes thus unawares,
Gladly they face with merry cheerful hearts
The worst of gales; and every hazard dare
Of jagged rocks, of rough and angry seas,
Of broken water, and of contrary winds.
Moreover, when they from the mainland sail,
Ere from the hostile shore they yet have dragged
Their firm-held anchors, 'tis their custom vile
When homeward bound to give up each tenth man
Amongst their wretched captives to grim death.
In place of ransom anguish they extort;
And to appease their gods must these poor souls
Suffer slow agonies, till in the end
They find a watery death, thrown in the sea . . .
Yet in their cruelty are they most fair,
Casting the lots with perfect equity;
Nor do they thus torment their prisoners
For malice, but are bound by solemn vow
To offer this absolving sacrifice.
They torture men in their religion's name,
And no plea serves to soften their hard hearts . . .
May God preserve us from the Saxons, friends! . . .
Yet we need fear them not . . . With steadfast souls,
With courage high and with a constant mind,

We'll beat them now as in those bygone days
When spite of all our woes we held the Wall.

In very truth we were a motley crew,
Hard to control, lacking good discipline.
At this time with us many rascals served;
For our recruits came not as in old days
From the best classes in the Provinces,
But rather from the scourings of the towns,
The refuse of the country . . . All such dregs
As were not snapped up by Imperial Rome
To serve in Syria, on Rhine, in Gaul,
Or keep the Dacian border . . . And these men
Were officered by those e'en worse than they;
Gamblers, conspirators, who exiled came
To air their wrongs in Britain's bracing clime;
Loose-livers, scoundrels scoffed at e'en in Rome;
Such were the most of those upon the Wall;
Though with some sprinklings of a better sort,
Too poor to live in decent style at home,
Who by their poverty were forced to dwell
In foreign lands, yet were right worthy men
Who did their duty well and died for Rome.

I'll ne'er forget that night when we marched in;

How Maximus came through the Inner Gate,
Down from the ramparts where he had stood guard,
And 'neath the Arch was met by several men;
Officers by their dress, but by their mien
Seemed to be drunken loafers . . . One called out,
Tipsily mocking, as he blocked the road,
" Salute, ye fellows! Hail our General!
Here is the Captain of the Central Wall . . .
Our worthy Tribune who doth sentry go . . .
What an example! . . . Mark him . . . 'Tis just so
That ye should march . . . Oh, thou art drunk, thou fool!
Hold up! " . . . He clutched his comrade's arm, then bawled,
" Where are those soldi[6a] that thou owest me
Over that cock-fight we had yester-morn?
I backed young Nero's bantam against thine,
And faith! The best bird won . . . Why gruntest thou?
Thou'rt not too drunk to pay . . . Hand over, man! "—
" I owe thee naught "—" Thou dost! "—" Take payment then . . .
I hate thy thievish ways . . . So, Publius, so
I'll pay thee with good interest what I owe " . . .

[6a] Solidus = aureus, a gold coin.

He smote his fellow, who the blow returned,
That the young fool reeled lurching forward prone,
Right at the feet of angry Maximus. Quoth he
To the Centurion who strode at his heels,
" Arrest them, Lucian! . . . So! What mean ye,
Sirs?
What order keep ye here? Is this the way
That Roman officers are wont to use?
By all the Gods ye shall learn discipline . . .
Stand to attention! " Grim his voice and look,
Sternly he eyed the tipsy youngsters, who,
Suddenly sobered, stood there trembling, pale . . .
With shaky voice, Publius, vain blustering,
Strove to excuse himself . . . " 'Twas Marius, Sir . . .
Marius is drunk, not I . . . We take him home . . .
I mean . . . We go to see him mount the Guard . . .
We meant no harm . . . I swear "—" Nay, Sir!
Spare me thine oaths . . . Thou art not drunk, say'st
thou?
Then art thou insolent without excuse . . .
Why goest thou ungirt, in civil garb?
Thy rank and regiment? Declare them, Sir! "
Said Publius sullenly, " I was sent here
From the Sixth Legion for three years to serve
With the First Cohort of the Tungrians,

The Third Detachment, the Fifth Century,
Detailed from Borcorvicus two months since . . .
I am Centurion, Martius Publius called . . .
As for my dress, Sir, everyone knows well
On Hadrian's Wall we go not fully armed
Except on duty on the ramparts, Sir ''—
'' Thou *wert* Centurion,'' said Maximus,
'' Now art thou but Simplaris[7] . . . Nay, 'twere best
That thou for twelve months serve as Munifex[8]
To prove thyself . . . See, Sir, that thou dost go
More fitly clad . . . All Legionaries know
In time of war our war-gear wear we all,
Whether on guard or not . . . For disrespect
And thy forgetfulness I'll find a cure
To help thee to remember . . . For twelve weeks
Wear thy full panoply as though on guard,
Taking the extra duties one and all;
And for thy rations shalt thou for that time
Have barley dealt thee for thy bread, not wheat;[9]
Water, not wine, and shalt abstain from meat.
Report unto the Prefect of the Camp,
Give him thy belt and sword . . . So, Sir, fall back!

[7] Vegetius, II. 7. *Armatus simplaris* = soldier receiving a single ration, i.e. ordinary pay, but exempt from certain "fatigue" duties.

[8] Veget. II. 7. *Munifex* = private soldier, liable for all duties.

[9] Polyb. VI. 38; Cic. Cluent. 46; Frontinus, IV., 25.

As for thy comrades, let them give their names " . . .
Shamefaced, they did so, to receive in turn
A sharp reproof and fitting penalty.
The fallen lad rose up from where he sprawled,
And stood there blushing deeply, much confused,
As Maximus said sternly, " Who art thou?
By dress Asturian surely? Can it be?
Art thou on duty? " Humbly he replied,
" Yes, Sir! I should be now upon the Wall
To take the second Night-Watch . . . I am late . . .
My name's Caecilius Marius, Duplicar,[10]
Second Asturians, the First Turma,[10A] Sir."
Quoth Theodosius, who had silent stood
Behind the new-made Captain of the Wall,
With a slight frown, " He is 'neath my command,
Who am Sub-Prefect of that Ala made . . .
But thou art Prefect . . . Judge him, Maximus!
Hold now Tribunal . . . We await thy word " . . .
Said Maximus, " Be Duplicar no more,
Nor soldier in this Ala . . . Lay thou down
Thine inscribed shield, thy belt, thy worthless sword . .
Take off thy silver ring,[10B] Sir! Thou who hast
Betrayed thy trust, neglecting thus thy post . . .

[10] Next in rank to a Decurion—a kind of Senior Lieutenant.

[10A] Troop. [10B] Cf. Domaszewski, p. 54 (3).

As traitor I must judge thee . . . Stand prepared . . .
Hast thou now aught to urge ere I give doom? " . . .
The wretched boy said nothing . . . Only stared
Dull-eyed, uncomprehending . . . His young face
Shewed wan and ghastly in the lanterns' glare.
He fumbled at his belt with shaking hands,
Ungirded then his sword, his shield let fall,
And from his bared left arm loosed the bright ring
That marked his rank . . . With hanging head he laid
The sword and ring low at his Prefect's feet,
So staggered back, then stood as though a stone.
Said Lucian quickly, " Sir, I pray thee hear . . .
I know his record . . . 'Tis from errors clear
Save for this fault alone . . . Strong wine doth steal
His wits away . . . 'Tis not uncommon thing
In this raw climate, Lord . . . And he is young " . . .
Cried Publius suddenly, with flushed hot face,
" Have mercy, Sir! . . . I had been drinking too,
We all had, though I lied about it . . . Ah!
Judge him not harshly, noble Maximus! "
Maximus spake still sternly, yet there seemed
Suspicion of some tremor in his voice
As though he felt compassion, " Sentence hear!
Thou shalt receive a choice . . . Thy comrades say
Thou bearest good report in other things;

But thou hast sinned against our Roman code;
Thou know'st as well as I the Martial Law,
That when on active service any man
Is proved to shirk his duty, that man dies,
Be he a private, be he general . . .
Thou hast shewn gross neglect, O Duplicar!
This is the only mercy I may grant . . .
Choose, if thou wilt, to the Barbarians go
By the North Gate, degraded, yet free man . . .
May be to save thy life . . . The Gods alone
Know what thy fate . . Though this is sure, my son . .
An thou art caught by outposts of our own
Within three days yet lurking in our lines,
Thou diest crucified upon the Wall,
As doubly traitor and an outlawed man . . .
If thou dost not choose this, thou shalt straightway
Die by the axe . . . There is no other choice . . .
The rods and axe! Or else go seek the Picts! ''

For a brief space the young man bowed his head
In bitterness of soul, then bravely said,
Standing erect, his drunken stupor past,
'' I'm ready, Sir . . . Death by the soldier's axe
Shall be my choice . . . But . . . but '' . . . He stammering spakë,

And deeply flushed as he thought on his shame,
" Wilt spare the rods? . . . I am no traitor, Sir . . .
Degrade me not . . . My fault I'll expiate . . .
I will not test the mercy of the Picts . . .
I saw what late they did to Decius . . .
I found his body . . . What they left of it " . . .
He tried to laugh, but choking, stood there mute
For one short moment . . . Then gave the salute.
Said Maximus, " Thou art a gallant fool . . .
Pity it is thou hadst not stronger head . . .
Now must thou lose it . . . But thine honour's safe,
Thou shalt not taste the rods . . . Go, Lucian, haste!
Bid the Camp-Prefect come! . . . A squad of men . . .
Summon the stators![11] . . . Get all quickly done . . .
Thou, Buccinàtor, straightway blow thy horn!
Sound thou the signal for a soldier's doom[11a] . . .
The *Classicum*! " But ere the man had time
To sound the first note of that signal dread,
Said Theodosius quickly, " Prefect, wait!
One moment, Clemens . . . I have here a plan
To use this man's most justly forfeit life.
He is but young to die . . . Give him a chance . . .
I hear he is well-skilled in the Picts' tongue;

[11] Statores = military police, orderlies. Cf. Domaszewski, *Rangordnung d. rom. Heeres*, pp. 28, 39, 55.

[11a] Cf. Vegetius, II. 22.

He might right easily have saved his life
By slipping through their lines . . . He is no knave . . .
Mercy combine with justice, Maximus!
He might have gone . . . Well, bid him go and try
To learn their plans . . To bring us back fresh news . .
But let him not go outlawed, but as spy.
There is some rumour of a landing late
Upon the Western coasts of Scottish men,
Gaels from Hibernia. Let him bring us word
What passes in those parts, and thus redeem
His sordid past " . . . In Marius' eyes a gleam
Of re-born hope was kindled . . . " Lord," gasped he,
Turning to Maximus, " Let me go free;
I swear I will find out this plot or die . . .
Yet . . . if I die . . . wilt grant one thing to me?
O God! Sir . . . Keep this from my Father's ears . . .
Shame not brave Secundinus, who has served
As Tribune of the Sixth for many years
With honour and renown . . . Wilt spare him, Sir? "
He shivered then a little and stood still,
Looking on Maximus with eager eyes,
Who dryly said, shrugging his shoulders high,
Not over-pleased that Theodosius spake
To alter thus his judgement, yet relieved
To give the boy a chance, " Go then, my son!

Thy Father shalt not hear of this from me . . .
But blame me not if thou art trapped by those
Who will not grant thee quick death by the axe . . .
Upon a Roman cross thou'dst softer lie
Than on the bed made by the Little Folk " . . .
Said Marius, " Lord, I know it . . . But I keep
Mine honour and my father's name unsoiled . . .
I thank thee for this mercy undeserved . . .
Have I thy leave? " Kindly spake Maximus,
" Go! . . . And return in safety with thy news . . .
If thou wouldst have a horse, take one of mine " . . .
But Marius shook his head, "Amongst the Picts
Out on the heather horses are no good . . .
I thank thee, Lord, for thy most generous thought . . .
Sirs, I salute you! . . . Comrades all, farewell " . . .
He turned and went . . . That night before the dawn
He slipped outside the Northern Gate, and so
Vanished completely . . . Of him for a space
We heard no tidings; no man knew his fate.
We feared the worst and gave him up for dead.
But Publius humbly served as Munifex,
Toiling with common soldiers painfully,
Shared their plain food and took their scanty pay,
Nor grumbled much, bearing a cheerful face;
Which thing was noted well by Maximus.

ADVENTURE V.

How Maximus rode North to inspect the Wall of Antoninus—How Rufo the Campigene killed a sheep and fell into disgrace thereby—Marching-Song of the Second Asturians—How Marius came back from the Picts.

Six months had passed, the winter was nigh gone,
A cruel winter filled with stress and storm . . .
Men had forgotten in those woeful days
The fate of Marius . . . No one spake his name . . .
Until one night I heard Theodosius say,
As he and Maximus sat o'er their wine,
With a slight shrug, " That fellow sure is dead,
No news comes to us from the Western shore,
And my First Turma lacks a Duplicar . . .
A pity, Clemens " . . . Maximus replied,
" The axe had kinder been . . . A cleaner death . . .
I knew the boy had little chance of life . . .
Lucian, next week see that his name be struck
From off the roll . . . Till then, reserve his place."
Quoth Theodosius, " Why reserve it, man?
I want a Duplicar . . . Wilt thou give me
Young Martius Publius? He has well redeemed
His former folly . . . Why reserve the post
When we all know that Marius is dead? "

Said Maximus, " I know not, but I will
Keep it yet seven days for the lost lad . . .
Alive or dead none other takes his place
Until the eighth day dawns . . . Then make your
choice . . .
Young Publius, or another . . . I have said " . . .

Now on the seventh day of that same week
Maximus led a vexillation out
To visit frontier posts. Well-armed rode all,
Well-mounted each man of the Asturians;
And I went with them as a liticen,[1]
Who had learnt all the bugle-calls, and knew
Both clear and high, prompt at my Prefect's word
To sound the advance, or loud peal forth the charge.

Along the valley of North Tyne we rode
On that March morning, windy, bright and clear . . .
Awhile along the narrow winding dale
Above the wet green meadows runs the way
Uplifted high, whence we just caught a gleam
Of water rushing 'twixt o'erhanging woods.
On the wide sky line, north and south and east,
We saw the ridges of the moorland stretch
With rounded summits, sometimes crowned by firs,

[1] Bugler.

More often barren. Where our road dipped down
Unto the water's edge, we saw the stream
Dashing its amber flood in frothy spate
Through wooded gorges by tall limestone cliffs,
That beetling hung above the foaming tide,
Tunnelled with caverns where the hollow roar
Of rushing waters sounded evermore,
Reverberating, clamorous, confused . . .
Upon the crags' high crests the wych-elms waved
Their long gaunt arms; the stunted oaks upreared
Their crooked, twisted heads; the silvery birch,
The ash and rowan, graceful limbs displayed . . .
Naked, were't not for the soft morning mist
That wrapped them in its fleecy mantle close,
Till the imperious sun in strength and pride,
Like some proud Sultan who would choose his bride,
Bade them unveil . . . When they reluctant seemed,
And, mist-enveloped, still withheld their charms,
He, in his ardour brooking no delay,
Snatcht off their filmy covering, and they stood
In all the beauty of their slender growth
Discovered to our eyes . . .
So we rode on
Across the moorland, o'er the heather ridge,
Towards the grey hills of the uplifted North

That like a barrier rose across our path . . .
Sometimes we passed by belts of quaking moss
And swampy quagmires, whence rose screeching snipe,
But late returned from their long journey south;
Or startled grouse, still in their winter dress,
Flew from our coming . . . O'er the heath blew fresh
The keen March wind, the blue sky overhead
Was like an arch[2] of shining steel, all flecked
By little feathery clouds that scudding fled
Driven before the gale, and flitting past
Cast dancing shadows o'er the trackless moor,
Which, like a wild unfettered sea, rolled on
Towards the slopes of the rough shaggy hills,
Whose flanks were clothed with forests black and drear,
Whose peaks stood bleak and rugged, brown and bare.

As we drew near the sources of the Jed
We left the vale of Tyne for bare Redesdale,
And set our horses trotting on the road,
The long, long road that to Bremenium leads,
That Saxon dogs have since called Riechester,[3]
Guarding the Dere Street[3A] . . . Here roamed goats and
sheep . . .

[2] Cf. R. Kipling Hist. of England (Fletcher and Kipling) pp. 19-21, Centurion's Song, Stanza 4.

[3] High Rochester, or High Riechester. [3A] or Watling Street.

The sturdy black-faced agile mountain sheep,
That, hearing horses trampling, gathered close:
A solid phalanx, blocking all our path . . .
At which our troopers laughed; and one of them,
Who with three others as advance-guard rode,
In wanton mischief cried, moved by his greed,
" See! Caledonians dare to bar our way . . .
What price will good Scotch mutton be to-day?
Have at 'em, comrades! " Then, with low-poised spear,
He rode a fine tup down, transfixing it
That bleating it sank dead. Whereat we heard
From shepherds angry shouts, but from our men
Much noisy laughter, and the march was stayed . . .

Cried one, " Hi, Rufo! I will sup with thee " . . .
Another yelled, " 'Twill pay thy debt to me! "
The shepherds bawled, " Why kill ye thus our sheep?
Better the Picts than ye vile Roman thieves! "
The while their cur-dogs, growling, shewed their fangs,
And, snarling, snapped about our horses' heels . . .
Loud shouted Lucian, chief Decurion,
Purple with anger, " Ho there, Advance-Guard!
What do ye? . . . Halt! . . . Pass back the word, ye fools! . . .

Buglers, sound halt! . . . Confusion seize your souls!
What maggots breed within your perished brains? . . .
See to the rear ranks . . . Smartly, Duplicars!
Wouldst have the Picts fall on us unawares?
Oh! By the Lord, re-form! . . . Close up, curst swine! . . .
Ye're fit for naught save to be crucified! ''
Maximus rode up hastily and heard
How Duplicarès cursed, Decurions swore,
Striving in vain to clear the road . . . He called,
'' Ho! Front ranks, halt! Take care,[4] the Turma! 'Shun!
From the right tell off by sections! Flank-guides, prove![4A] . . .
Pass back the word, Decurions, to the rear! . . .
So! As you were! . . Dress ranks! Alignment keep! . .
Now tell me, men! Who was it killed that sheep? ''

The startled troopers sat as turned to stone
In ordered lines, but answer made they none . . .

'' Which of ye rode as point? . . Come! Answer me! . .
Thou, Rufo? . . . What? Who bade thee practise here

[4] Old term for *Make ready!* or *Attention!*

[4A] Cavalry Training, *1918*, p. 172.

Thy skill at spear-play? Art thou Campigene,[5]
And knowst not to keep order on the march?
Thou wouldst learn to be Headsman, so I hear . . .
See that thine own head pay not forfeit first . . .
Dismount! Thy horse's bridle give to him
Who is thy covering file . . . Now, Sir, 'bout turn!
Upon thy shoulders take thou this same sheep . . .
A mighty fellow by the look of him . . .
Fall out! Stand clear! . . . Prepare to bear thy load!
Fall in behind! So follow to the Camp . . .
Thou can'st not miss the way; 'tis a straight road . . .
See that thou make report ere falls the dark,
For thine own safety's sake . . . No murmuring, men!
There is no need, for ye shall have the sheep
At Rufo's cost, deducted from his pay . . .
Keep order in the ranks! So . . . Silence there!
Camp-Prefect! See the shepherds paid in full . . .
I'll have no looting save at my command . . .
Warn those glum herdsmen that they molest not
My trooper on the road, or they shall find
Their huts ablaze, and forfeit all their flocks " . . .
Sharply he swung his arm from rear to front,
And his right hand was pointing to the North . . .
" Liticen! Forward sound, at the quick trot!

[5] For *Campigene*, see Vegetius, *De Re Mil.* II. ch. VII.

Trumpeters, play! Strike up a lively march!"

With muttered growling curses, low but deep,
The unhappy Rufo shouldered the fat sheep
Amidst the jeering comments of his friends.
When we came round the bend we rode at ease,
And long we saw him toiling on our track,
Head down and panting, staggering 'neath his load . . .
But as we rode we sang with merry hearts,
Heedless of him, his punishment, his plight . . .
For we were mostly young, and it was Spring,
The joyous tide, when birds and boys will sing,
And in precarious ways go carelessly,
Nor take much heed if one fall by the way.
Thus then we sang, while our gay tubas played,
A cheerful song, yet something was it sad . . .

Come, Veterans! Come, ye Recruits! Join in our
Marching Song . . .
For ever, of course, the Asturian Horse with jest and
song ride on . . .
So sing we altogether, my lads, to greet the new-born
day!
With a laugh and a song we'll ride along . . . 'Twill
cheer us on our way . . .

Don't you hear the trumpets calling? Don't you see
'tis dawn of day?

Don't you mark Decurions bawling? "Saddle up, men! . . . Mount! Away!"
When the Liticens their bugles blow, don't you know that none must stay?
For we're marching out this morning . . .
Our trumpets play as we ride away,
Our horses are fresh and our hearts are gay;
Let cowards bide . . . Let dastards stay . . .
Asturians ride with the dawning.

We have come from southern borders, through Gaul from sunny Spain,
And if Rome gives us our orders, why, we'll ride as far again . . .
Aye, even to Ultima Thulè take ship across the main . .
For we're marching far this morning . . .
But we'll not complain, nor yet draw rein,
Till we've raided the North over hill, dale and plain;
Where our troopers ride ye shall mark by the slain,
When Asturians ride in the dawning.

Can't you hear our horses trotting on the broad white open road?
What matter if Fate's lotting to each man his unknown load
Of wounds, of death may be? What good to ill forebode

When we're marching in the morning?
Were we not pledged all at our Prefect's call,
As we drank his health in the lamp-lit Hall,
To play the game boldly, though some should fall
When we ride out with the dawning?

Do you think we mind the weather? Come hail, frost, snow or sleet,
As we ride across the heather . . . Let the wind in our faces beat . . .
So we track our wily foeman, so the Pict shall know defeat
When we ride at early morning . . .
With a sharp thrust and blow we'll lay the knaves low,
Oh, we'll cut and we'll slash as our swift horses go
Galloping, trampling over the foe
As we ride out in the dawning.

Then just think, boys, of the looting, when we ride to Camp once more!
To good archers for their shooting, to brave lancers precious store
Of gold and cattle, wine and women . . . Why! what can men want more?
As we march home in the gloaming

Our dragons blow in the wind, and glow
In the setting sun . . . Soon red wine shall flow,
The cups circling pass, and all troubles go
When Asturians come back from their roaming.

The younger men ceased singing, and laughing they rode along,
While the older men in chorus deep took up the marching-song . . .

When we've grown a little older, maybe a change will come;
No more shoulder unto shoulder shall we mount and ride and roam;
But some with wives and children dear shall settle down at home,
And some of us shall resting sleep in the Northland o'er the foam . . .

No longer in the morning,
When at sunrise comes red dawning,
Shall we hear the trumpets pealing, "Boot, saddle and away!"

Our worn-out steeds have gone to grass,
From languid hand down falls the glass,
What profits life and love? . . . Alas!
Since youth must fade, since joy must pass?
Our crumbling armour fast doth rust,
Soon we ourselves shall be but dust,

Old age from us is slyly stealing all desire to play . . .
When the Emperor Death gives marching orders, who may disobey?

Each Asturian, softly sleeping, shall his well-earned rest be keeping;
Nor shall he hear, however clear, the Liticen's harsh call;
For he shall lie by rushing stream and dream the live-long day.
From irksome duties he is freed;
No longer moved by love or greed,
No longer doomed to toil or bleed
His life away for paltry pay;
No longer at the Prefect's word
He shews his skill with lance or sword,
No longer joins in charge or fray . . .

Unheard will be the angry word, though loud Decurions bawl,
In future years on other ears shall their harsh accents fall;
He shall not need at all to heed
Though shrill the trumpets call,
When with his comrades dead he shares their lowly bed
And in the lap of Mother Earth lies down forgetting all . . .

His weary head shall rest soft on her kindly breast,
Nor shall he tire of that long sleep nor find the stillness pall . . .

Leave of absence he is taking, nor returns, though hearts are breaking.
On the stone that's set above him, placed there by the hands that love him,
You may read his deeds recorded . . . How his friends admired, applauded . . .
How his heart was stout, nor failed him . . . How his comrades long bewailed him . . .
See! Beneath his plunging steed, his barbarian foe doth bleed![4B]

Yet each soldier, softly sleeping,
Still in death his watch is keeping,
As he lies at rest and dreaming 'neath the shadow of the Wall.
Still he guards the Northern Way, waiting for the Judgement Day;
Till Gabriel's Trump he shall hear sounding,
Through these rocky vales resounding . . .
Then with comrades close around him
He shall ride forth at that Call . . .

[4A] The customary Cavalry Monument. Cf. Bruce, Hdbk. Roman Wall, 1921, pp. 83-84.

As on the wind the veterans' voices rose and fell away,
The younger men resumed their song in lusty tones and gay . . .

What reck we of death and mourning?
We are young . . . We want no warning . . .
Don't you hear our bugles calling?
Falling, calling . . . calling, falling . . .
On the breeze their clear notes flowing
Far, till in the distance dying . . .
Loud, then low, our trumpets blowing
O'er the hills are echoes bringing,
To our tubas sweet replying . . .

In our hearts that music ringing
Makes us merry, we ride singing . . .
Hark! Our officers are crying,
" On, brave boys! " . . . Who thinks of dying
When we're riding hell for leather
Over the dark purple heather?
Standards flying, horses galloping,
All our squadrons forward trampling . . .
Rattling bridles, jingling curb-chains,
As we ride with loosened reins . . .

When the even-tide has come
'Twill be time to think of home . . .
Now 'tis daylight, and the sun
Scarce has yet his course begun . . .
So, Asturians! At the dawning
Ride we, ride we, this fair morning!

We lay at Riechester[5] that night. Well pleased
Was young Palladius, who this fortress held,
To see our Vexillation riding in, for he
Had tidings of some movement 'mongst the Picts,
And doubted lest they gathered in great force.
No longer was Bremenium the strong place
It was in Hadrian's day, for, all defaced,
Its outer walls lay burnt and ruinous.
It was still held by that most gallant troop,
The Vocontiorum Ala, riders known
To fear not Pict nor devil. With them there,
Beneath brave Arrius Messala, were
Two Centuries who from that Legion came
That has for standard the fierce Charging Boar . . .
The Twentieth Legion, known well by ye all . . .
A Cohort of Vardùli, too, from Spain.

The next morn we rode forth right heedfully,
And all that day, and many days, rode on
Over the wilderness of heath and moor
To mark each lonely outpost in the hills.
From Bridgeness on the Forth unto the Clyde
We rode along the Antoninian Wall . . .
What there was left of it . . . For ruined lay

[5] High Rochester = Bremenium.

Its strongest castles, and its turrets low
Long time had crumbled, their stones borne away
To build not forts, but farmsteads. Here and there
We found the towers established once again
As Theodosius, our great General, planned.
Detachments had come north with pick and spade,
And sturdily the Legionaries toiled,
Repairing with skilled hands the broken Wall,
That was of turf compacted, not of stone.
Northwards we rode, and Ardoch's ruins saw
That lie near Braco; and that fortress viewed
That guarded once the junction of the streams
Of Tay and Isla, which, dismantled, shews
What Rome once dreamt of . . . And her shattered
dreams . . .

Our horses' heads then to the West we turned
And rode through upland valleys wild and stern,
Past lofty mountains, craggy rocks, thick woods,
By many a deep morass, fen, bog and moss,
O'er stony ways by straitened passages,[6]
Fording great rivers; so with grievous pains,
Our men right weary, horses nigh fordone,
Unto Bemulie[7] Fortress we drew near,

[6] Cf. Holinshed V. 13. [7] Balmuildy

The station fifth in number from Clyde Mouth,
That had been lately garrisoned anew,
Its walls rebuilt in parts and well repaired.
But, ere we reached it, as we rode in fours
Along the way just before twilight fell . . .
The sun still ling'ring in the western sky,
A ball of crimson sinking in the loch,
The shadows lengthening on the long white road
Of the tall ashes and slim rowan-trees
That overhung the way for many miles . . .
From out the dark recesses of the gorse,
Which loomed up black against the golden sky,
Rose suddenly a huddled, tattered form,
That lurching forward fell, a heap of rags,
An inert mass, before our chargers' hooves.
The great black horse that Maximus rode reared
And stood erect, yet cunningly came down
With careful heed lest he should tread upon
That which his instinct told him was a man . . .
For so are horses made, that wilfully
They will not harm what falls beneath their feet . . .
Maximus checked him skilfully, sat firm;
His hand high flung, with loud voice cried he "Halt!"
And all the regiment, even as one man,

Reined in and waited on their General's word . . .
Theodosius, who with Maximus that day
Rode in advance, leapt down, and with an oath,
Stooping across the prostrate man, cried out,
" By Castor and by Pollux! It is he . . .
Young Marius come back! . . . Ye Gods! But see
In what a plight . . . He'll die here on our hands " . . .
He lifted up the still unconscious man,
Holding him not ungently in his arms . . .
Maximus sprang down too, and bent o'er him,
Then swiftly turning unto me, he said,
" Sound thou the ' Surgeons' Call,' young Quintus, quick! " . . .
In answer to the bugle's urgent peal
A surgeon rode up, and, dismounting, ran
To give such help as lay within his power . . .
Our army-doctors were all well-skilled men,
I warrant ye they practice had enough . . .
Swiftly he bent o'er the unconscious man,
Took from his wallet lint and bandages;
Then, with quick hand, unslung his leathern flask . . .
Quoth he, " Sir! Pray thee raise his head that I
May give this cordial . . . 'Tis a potent draught
That oft has cheated Charon of a fare . . .
Though I much doubt he's gone . . . Yet, hold him there " . . .

Spiced wine he poured with steady, careful hand
Down the poor wretch's throat, who quivering shook
As with an ague, rolled his eyes and gasped,
Then sank back senseless, rigid, deadly pale . . .
Maximus spake, " Come, good Marcellus, haste!
Put life into the lad . . . Or is he dead?
We must not stay here . . . Night draws on apace "—
" General, he lives . . . See how this rowan-leaf
Is stirred by the faint current from his lips . . .
But he is sorely wounded . . . Bleeds apace . . .
And look, Sir! See . . . His chest is blistered wounds
From neck to waist . . . 'Tis the Picts' handiwork . . .
Wilt thou that we shall sling him carefully
Between two horses that he softly go?
But first, Sir, by thy leave, I will just bind
This ugly gash he has on his right thigh,
And, ere we move him, somewhat ease these burns " . .
Maximus nodded, and the surgeon turned
To Theodosius . . . " Noble Sir, wilt hold
The patient firmly . . . Raise his leg . . . Just so . . .
Give him more wine . . . See, he is coming to . . .
There, friend! Lie still . . . 'Tis all but fixed . . .
Come now,
Grip hard my shoulder, lad " . . . With deft skilled
hands

Marcellus bound the torn thigh, chest and arms;
While Marius, fully conscious now, bit hard
His lips, and leant back 'gainst the breast
Of Theodosius, his uninjured hand
Grasping the surgeon's shoulder for support.
He muttered feebly, " Where's the General?
News . . . I bring news . . . O Maximus! . . . Be quick . .
I shall forget . . . My duty . . . Not neglect . . .
I'll not neglect " . . . His failing voice died down
To a faint whisper . . . Maximus said, " Haste!
Hast done, Marcellus? . . . Theodosius, bid
The Scouts spread wide, foes well may lurk ahead
In these thick whin-bushes, and it grows dark . . .
Give me the lad . . . Prepare a litter straight!
Now, Marius, lie thou easy . . . Thy tale tell
In Camp, my boy . . . Hurry there, orderlies! "
The surgeon bade the orderlies quick sling
Their folded blankets crosswise on long poles
Between two steady troop-horses, thereon
They placed the wounded man, so, trotting, came
Unto Bemulie gladly ere sundown.

'Twas Marius' Uncle who held this strong post,
Julius Caecilius Nepos, at this time
A Tribune in the Sixth. Though somewhat aged,

Great his experience in the Northern Wars . .
A trusty, proved and gallant veteran,
He had been sent with vexillaries skilled
To well repair this section of the Wall.
Beneath his orders were two Cohorts placed . . .
Cohorts of Horse, if I do not mistake . . .
Not cavalry, but mounted infantry,
Some of whom scarcely knew to sit a horse . . .
At least we thought so in the Imperial Guard . . .
Caecilius was a somewhat hasty man;
Choleric, bluff, proud of his name and line.
Astonished and much grieved, his nephew he
Saw thus brought in. To Maximus he gave
But a cool greeting . . . Little love was lost
Between the Tribune of the old Roman House
And the Asturian-Briton, half his years,
Raised thus above his head . . . He hated him;
Nor loved he better Theodosius,
Who also was a Spaniard, foreign-born.
He grumbled, " So, Sirs! Ye have had your will
Of my poor kinsman . . . Give me here the lad;
I doubt he's dying . . . 'Tis too bad . . . Too bad!
I heard that ye dismissed him in disgrace
For some mere trifle . . . He, a Roman born
Of the most noble, famed Caecilian Line,

And of the Marians on his father's side . . .
Fye! What a coil is this! . . . He lies as dead . . .
Thy pardon, General! . . . I see thou'rt come
To make here inquisition . . . All is well . . .
My scouts bring no fresh news in . . . They tell me
There's ne'er a Pict seen south of Anton's Wall,
Nor north of it, these seven weeks or more . . .
The Scots lie close . . . No Attacots have been
So daring bold as to come near this Post . . .
Wilt take the key, Sir, of the Treasure-vault,
Or see my papers first? Inspect the walls?
Or shall I now parade the garrison? . . .
What! Dine first, sayest thou? . . . O Sir, 'tis well . .
'Tis very well . . . Yet not so was the way
Of Fullobaudes . . . Or of Hadrian . . .
'Twas not by feasting that Agricola
Planted his forts and kept the Picts at bay" . . .
Quoth Maximus amused, "Why! Sir, I hold
With your old friend Vegetius, who trained me,[8]
That soldiers fight best with their stomachs filled;
A fasting man but peevish counsel gives,
Ill-nourished brains conceive things all awry,
And every petty mishap hungry folk
Do magnify into some monstrous ill . . .

[8] Cf. Vegetius III. 3 and 26.

So taught thy father, eh! Theodosius?" . . .
He nodded, laughing . . . "Come, Sir, lead the way,
Hungry as hunters are my famished men . . .
But while thy cooks prepare a welcome meal,
I will inspect thy papers willingly . . .
Yet first would see thy kinsman fittingly
Bestowed. He has some pressing news for me,
Which he, if strong enough, shall now unfold.
Theodosius . . . Noble Nepos . . . Will ye hear?
Quintus, bring thou my tablets and a style" . . .

The three men sought the berth where Marius lay,
Propped up by pillows . . . His dark eyes agleam,
Feverish yet keen . . . His breath came in quick gasps,
As with an effort his strange tale he told.
The watching surgeon gave him wine, and kept
An arm about him; "Sir," said the poor lad,
"I have kept faith . . . I have been in the West . . .
The Picts caught me as I was coming back,
They kept me pent ten days . . . More like ten years . . .
They questioned me right straitly, but I lied . . .
I told them naught, Sir . . Hence thou seest these scars,
And these green wounds on breast and arms and back . .
O God!" He shuddered . . . "Red-hot spits, and
worse . . .

I know not . . . I forget . . . No more of that . . .
It was not this I fain would tell thee, Sir,
But something else . . What was it? . . Ah! I know . .
I got away by luck . . . They thought me dead,
So left me loose, unguarded in their den . . .
I slipped out past their watchmen from my bed
Of filthy straw, three nights or more agone . . .
Oh, tell me, Sir! What month, what day is this?
Am I too late to save them? . . . Tell me, Sir! ''
Said Maximus, " Why, lad! 'Tis April now . . .
In one short week 'twill be the first of May . . .
What of it, Marius? Whom wouldest thou save? . . .
Alas, Marcellus! the poor lad doth rave . . .
Give him some sedative . . . I must be gone . . .
He has no news . . . 'Tis but his frenzied brain '' . . .
But Marius, clutching feebly, caught his arm
With twisted fingers, "Go not, Sir! . . . Stay, stay!
I wander not, though I am passing weak . . .
I have news truly . . . Doctor, give me drink . . .
O Maximus! They tortured me so sore . . .
Have patience, Sir, and I will tell thee more '' . . .
The General rose, then came to where the boy
Lay in the surgeon's arms, " Come, give him me . . .
Marcellus, I will hold him. Now, my lad,
Tell us what happened . . . Thou hast news, I see."

Marius, leaning forward, spake with pain;
Pausing at times for rest, and breathing hard,
He gasped out, " Maurice, Sir! . . . Count Maurice lies
A prisoner doomed to die . . . Thou must be there
Before the dawn of the first day in May
If thou wouldst save him . . . It is Beltane Day,
The Druids' Festival . . . It will be kept
As in the olden times . . . With blood of men
They will appease their Gods . . . He is thy friend . . .
He tried to save my life . . . For that he dies . . .
Conan . . . Black Conan helped me . . . Set me free . . .
No longer he's thy foe . . . He bade me say . . .
Say what? . . . It's gone . . . I cannot tell thee, Sir . . .
The Picts caught me as I was coming back . . .
I knew their tongue, though they suspected not . . .
An I had not escaped, on the next morn
They would have flayed me, and then staked me down
For flies and ants to crawl o'er my peeled form . . .
I heard them say so . . . They are devils, Sir . . .
I saw . . . and heard . . . How they killed other men . . .
It was not that . . . What was it I must tell?
O God! I have forgotten, General " . . .
He broke down, sobbing, anguish in his eyes . . .
Said Maximus, " Now gently, lad . . . Take time . . .
Drink first this cordial; lean back at thine ease,

Now tell us what thou sawest in the West . . .
Where didst thou venture? How didst thou get back?"
Said Marius suddenly, " O Sir, prepare!
Thou must ride out at once, and I with thee
To guide thee . . . Aye, and we must sail the seas,
My General, now; or it will be too late . . .
Too late " . . . He tried to raise himself, but slipped
Back swooning, then as a dead man
Lay helpless in the arms of Maximus,
Who beckoned to the surgeon . . . " Take the lad,
Try what thy skill may do . . . Dost think he'll live? "
Marcellus bent o'er Marius, took his wrist,
Feeling the feeble pulse, and shook his head . . .
Then took from out his pouch some essence rare . . .
I know not what . . . Quoth he, " It may be, Sir,
This shall revive him; but he is nigh gone;
Those devils have played havoc with the boy."
He forced the potent drug through the clenched teeth
Of the sick man, who, rousing, wildly stared . . .
Then, seeing Maximus, strove hard to speak;
But naught save jangled words came from his lips . . .
At last he stammered, " Sir . . . To Leog's Isle[9] . . .
Come nearer, General . . . Don't leave me, Sir . . .
Callernish . . . Maurice, save . . . What more, what more?

[9] I. of Lewis.

Beware of Eugen . . . He plays traitor, Sir . . .
He joins with Heirgust and the Galloway Picts . . .
'Tis old King Fincomarke who orders all . . .
Lord Maximus, I'm tired . . . I cannot tell
More of the tale . . . Thou know'st the end . . . I fell
Into the hands of some of Nectan's men . . .
The Little Folk . . . Mæatæ we call them,
Or Verniconès . . . Oh! 'tis all the same . . .
Some Eastern band out raiding . . . Then I knew
What 'tis to bear sharp torment . . . I ne'er knew
What pain was like before . . . Ah! General!
Don't let them come here! I can hear them crawl . . .
Look! There's one creeping from that corner . . . Ah!
For God's sake don't . . . You fiends! No more, no
more . . .
Have ye no mercy? . . . How can I endure?
I'll tell ye nothing . . . Nothing . . . God help me! " . . .
He fell to shuddering; but, said Maximus,
" Why, Marius, lad! Take courage . . . None is here
To harm thee more . . . Oh, thou hast well endured . . .
Hast kept thy word, and won thine honour back . . .
Now shalt thou rest . . . What! Wouldst be talking yet?
See here, my boy! If thou wouldst ride with us,
Lie still at once, and let Marcellus give
Some sedative, so shalt thou softly sleep . . .

Here are no Picts . . . See, we are Romans all . . .
Look! 'Tis thine Uncle; here is ne'er a foe . . .
I'll act upon thy word; to Leog go
To save Count Maurice. In three days we sail,
And thou with us . . . Yes, yes . . . But now lie still! . . .
Come, Doctor! Take him . . . Nepos, I must go
To give some orders . . . Then thy papers, Sir . . .
Next will I with all speed inspect thy baths . . .
I hear thou hast new hypocausts just fixed,
And we are weary men, sore travel-stained . . .
Then, if by luck the dinner should be cooked,
Thy guests will do it honour gratefully!
How sayest thou, Theodosius? . . . Quintus, go!
Thou'rt half asleep already . . . Supper done,
Straight to thy bed! We rise before the dawn . . .
I must get galleys from Dunglas sent up
To Bowling Harbour, stores and crews aboard;
Then find me guides. We'll sail to Leog's Isle . . .
There is yet time . . . Marcellus, do thy part!
Cure thou this youngster . . . Put some life in him . . .
He shall sail on my galley . . . Once aboard,
He will pick up his strength. Then his strange tale
He shall relate in full . . . Here is no time,
He is too feeble yet. I have planned all . . .
Alclwyd we'll slip past in the dark one morn;

On our return we'll seize King Eugen's Burgh,
Though she defy us and fast close her gates.''
Said Theodosius, '' Wilt thou scale those cliffs?
I ever knew thee for ambitious man;
But, Maximus, an thou climb Alclwyd's walls . . .
Whose crags by eagles only are explored,
For never siege-ladders those heights may span . . .
Thou mayst aspire to th' Empire of the World . . .
It were as easy, and as possible.''
'' Why not? '' quoth Maximus, ''And thou, old friend;
Thou shalt take East, I West; and we shall prove
Right noble Emperors, for in us the World
Shall have two Rulers who are worth the name! ''
Laughing, they took each other's arms, and went
Forth from that chamber with themselves content.
Marius lay still and slept. Soon slept we all,
Till ere cockcrow we heard the bugles call,
So made us ready to ride forth at dawn.

ADVENTURE VI.

How Maximus made ready and sailed from Dunglas on the Clyde for the Isle of Leog in the Hebrides—How Quintus went aboard a Quinquereme for the first time and what he saw there.

Now had we little ease, for every man
Had his appointed and right arduous task.
To call in troops from Newstead and the Wall
Some rode express; others fared west to where
Not far from Bowling, in snug harbour, lay
The Roman fleet that still patrolled the Clyde . . .
Dunglas that harbour's name in Celtic tongue,
So called from the grey hill that o'er it hung,
Whereon a fortress stood to guard the port . . .
Not many ships lay there, just twelve all told;
But these well-found, with their full crews aboard;
Six triremes, with their triple banks of oars;
Two quinqueremes; four biremes; and besides
Some smaller boats, celices that swift brought
Despatches from the galleys to the port,
And, being light of draught, might well explore
The lochs and inlets of the Alban shore . . .
There too lay acatons, trim cutters small,
Twenty or more; and scaphas full two score,
Which were right handy skiffs with great lug sails.

The Prefect of the Ships was Rufius called . . .
Rufius Albinus, of the ancient line
Of famed Volusus,[1] he whom Virgil sang . . .
He, being poor and influence having not,
Was glad enough to take a naval post.
Without delay, he, at the General's word,
Made ready to weigh anchor. Maximus
Bade sail three triremes and four acatons,
Therewith one lofty, five-tiered quinquereme[2] . . .
Though somewhat top-heavy this vessel seemed
To sail those narrow firths and land-locked bays,
Where the uncertain wind in savage mood
Swoops down through deep-cleft gorges to the sea
To catch ships unawares and lay them low,
E'en as wild Picts fall on their Roman foe . . .

The third day after Marius returned,
The appointed troops were safely stowed aboard.
Maximus sailed upon the quinquereme,
Which held, I think, more than four hundred men,
Counting the troops together with her crew . . .
We had a Turma of the Asturians,
The First in rank, that numbered forty-two;

[1] See Virgil, Aen. XI., 463.

[2] For use of quinquereme at this period, cf. C. Torr "*Ancient Ships*," p. 16; Vegetius, V. ch. VII.

Also a Century of the Sixth was there
From the First Cohort, which made eighty more;
And the ship's crew of forty trained marines,
With five and twenty sailors skilled and bold,
And fifteen score and ten of rowers strong
Who for their sins must labour at the oar;
Besides our officers . . . Scant room had we . . .
The triremes held ten score and fifty men . . .
Counting the troops they carried, rather more . . .
For on each trireme sailed a Century,
Or Turma, in addition to the crew.
Thus for our horses we had barely space
Down between decks; we were packed cheek by jowl.

The war-galleys their anchors weighed and dropped
Down with the tide two hours before the dawn.
A gentle breeze from off the Northern hills
Now sped us on. In the dim light ere morn
Like ghostly ships our gliding vessels seemed,
Bound for the Islands of the Dead where dwell
The invisible souls of long-departed men.
The curlews and the sea-mews calling whined
From out the mist with whistling voices shrill
That teased our ears with their complaining sound.
Their unseen wings beat restlessly as though

Came disembodied phantoms hovering
To warn us of some danger that should come.
E'en Theodosius shuddered as with cold,
And Maximus was wrapped in moody gloom.
So we dropped down the river's broadening breast
Till we drew near Alclwyd, that castle strong,
Whose great rock rises towering to the skies:
A stronghold of the Gods, impregnable.
The basalt columns of its mighty base
Stand washed on three sides by the noble streams
Of Leven and of Clyde, that here embrace
And hold the fortress in their guardian arms;
The fourth side riseth sheer from out the marsh
Over against the wilderness of glens
And rocky hills, and network of deep fens,
Where the wild Picts and Caledonians hide.
This salt marsh twice a day is by the tide
Transformed into an inlet of the sea,
And then Alclwyd an island stronghold seems.
That which Agricola desired in vain
Was by the Romans later gained, then lost . . .
Theodosius won it back, but not for long,
He found he could not hold the Mouth of Clyde,
For Rome, by factions torn, denied him men.
Ere twelve months passed 'twas ceded to the Celts,

Placed in the hands of a young Alban Prince,
Eugenius, grandson of King Cormac Finn.
In this proud youth, unstable, vain, untried,
Count Theodosius hoped to find a friend:
But he was wrong, as Marius shortly proved.

Above our heads o'erhung the gloomy rock,
Whose high twin pinnacles we dimly saw
Rise threat'ning from the mist of early dawn.
From the tall Pharos that one summit crowns . . .
The higher and more pointed of the two . . .
There shone a red ray from the lantern down
That marked the river's winding rock-strewn course . .
That lighthouse, well we knew, by Roman hands
Was reared long time ago . . . Our Leader sighed,
And scanned the frowning heights with envious eye,
" The Eagles shall not lack their eyrie long,
I swear it, Theodosius," murmured he.
His comrade, laughing lightly, low replied,
" When thou dost scale Alclwyd, the Eagles then
Will have their glut of blood and lives of men . . .
I wonder is it worth it . . . Who can tell
How long we Romans shall in Alba dwell?
How long in Britain? There are signs, my friend . . .
For me the East . . . There shall our Legions pour,

And there find inexhaustible the store
Of marvellous riches. In those magic lands
Of luxury and glamour would I go
And rule the World from thence . . . if I must rule,
Though I'd as lief go till my farm in Spain . . .
Come what come may, I trust to see no more
The coasts of Britain . . . I like not the West . . .
Its gloom and misty vagueness I detest." . . .
He held his peace . . . Our helmsman, steering now
In the dark shadow of the Rock, slipt past
Unchallenged by the careless sentinels,
Who slept perchance on Alclwyd's lofty walls,
Deeming impregnable their citadel;
Nor did the creaking of our oars betray
Our presence to King Eugen's sleepy guards.
The kindly breeze bare our liburna[3] on,
Our rowers idle, all our square sails set;
Unstrained our rigging, and in the light wind
The sails were flapping, yet the ebbing tide
Bare us right swiftly. As the day drew on
The wind increased, and with a careful hand
And watchful eye our steersman must observe
The shouted orders and the warning cries

[3] General term for a war-galley. Cf. Torr, *Ancient Ships*, p. 16 Vegetius, V. ch. 3.

From the Proreta[4] stationed in the bows,
Who had to pilot him two friendly Picts.
These, for good pay, had now for many years
Guided the Roman war-ships through the deeps
And treacherous shallows of the River Clyde.

As we drew on towards the open sea
I looked about the ship with wondering eyes.
Though I had sailed a cock-boat on the Colne
Often enough, ne'er had I been allowed
To board a trireme, much as I had longed,
When Nectaridus, Count of the Sea-Shore,
Had brought his galleys in the Blackwater,
Or up the Colne. He was too strict a man
To let small boys adventure at their will . . .
Now I stood on a quinquereme at last,
And found my breath was coming in quick gasps
As I admired her slender, graceful lines . . .
Narrow in beam was she, a slight-built craft
That she might have great speed. To strengthen her
I saw her sides had waling cables stretched
From stem to stern. Fain to inspect these close
I leant across the carved oak balustrade
That fenced the poop . . . I felt my shoulder gripped,

[4] Look-out officer.

And springing up I met the keen sharp gaze
Of one I knew to be the Navarch's[5] self,
The Captain of the Galley. I had heard
He was Aurelius named, own brother's son
Unto Albinus, Prefect of the Fleet.
In charge of the liburnae was he sent
In lieu of Rufius Albinus, who
Stayed at Dunglas by Maximus' decree
To guard the river . . . I stood all confused,
Fearing I had done wrong unwittingly . . .
Quoth he, " My lad! What is it thou wouldst see? "
He smiled and looked less stern, then spake in jest,
" Thou hast thy sea-legs . . . Wouldst be a marine?
Or as a sailor wilt thou serve with me?
We want more seamen badly . . . Naval hands
Are hard to come by; maybe Maximus
Will spare me some smart youngsters such as thou " . .
Right well I read his thoughts . . . Recruits were scarce
For naval service, as they well might be;
For scanty pay and little credit had
The Roman fleet in those days . . . I but said,
Humbly enough, " I would well learn of thee,
Sir, an thou wilt . . . But I am liticen
In the Asturians, and little know

[5] *Navarch*, or *Trierarch* = Captain of the galley; Vegetius, V. 2

Of quinqueremes or galleys, though a horse
I can bestride as well as any man.''
He laughed and said, '' My 'Sea-Horse' o'er the waves
Goes light as any steed that skims the plains . . .
See now her bows, where that strong timber-work
Doth curve unto her keel . . . The apron we
Call those strong beams that give the bows support
And take the shock of ramming . . . Here astern
Thou seest two rudders, one on either side,
Where stands the Gubernator[6] who controls
The vessel's course . . . Mark thou how swift he turns
Her head from side to side by those slim ropes
That from the tillers of the steering-oars
Do run about those wheels . . . But why do I
Thus waste my scanty leisure? Go thou, Boy!
And look about thee as thou wilt, so that
Thou dost not meddle nor in mischief get . . .
Nor shalt thou, an thou'rt wise, go too nigh him
Who standeth on the prow . . . Herenius is
Somewhat short-tempered in the early morn . . .
We keep sharp order on a quinquereme,
And knotted ropes-ends are quite handy, lad! ''
He added, laughing, yet in meaning tones.
I took him at his word and ran to see

[6] Helmsman.

How the great three-toothed metal-headed beak
Cut through the waves, in shape like a ram's head.
Below I thought I saw a second spike
Shew through the foam that curled about the bows.
The galley's cheek-plates were a brilliant red,
And in their upper parts were two round eyes
Through which the cables of the anchors ran.
I ventured on the gangway that sprang out
On brackets jutting from the vessel's ribs,
And marked the turret on the foc'sle reared
Like to that on the poop . . . Beyond it stood
On the raised deck the Look-out Officer . . .
Proreta as they call him . . . Seeing me,
With angry voice he shouted, " Boy, get down!
Sentry! What dost thou? Send that land-lubber
Aft double-quick, or under hatches he
And thou shalt lie in irons! " . . . At which I fled,
Ere the marine, in heavy armour clad,
Could grip me as he meant . . . With lumbering tread
He strode along the gangway, but I had
Reached now the shelter of the deck-house aft,
And crouched down there to leeward . . Here I stayed
Waiting my master's call, who was engaged
With Theodosius and his officers,
As I could see through the half-open door,

Within the cabin, pricking out the course
With help of the ship's Captain, and the aid
That Marius gave him, who lay prostrate there
In a soft-cushioned berth. With languid hand
He pointed out the way on a rough chart,
Pausing at times to rest and close his eyes.
Before them stood a Pictish prisoner,
His arms fast tied, who gloomily enough
Made some short surly answers; moved by threats,
Or promises of gold . . . I knew not which,
For I heard not what passed . . . But I could guess,
Seeing fresh marks of burns upon his wrists
And a dark purple line that creased his brow . . .
Also I marked a knotted whipcord lie . . .
A glowing brasier, that two seamen bore,
I saw them grinning set without the door . . .
I thought the prisoner wise . . . I knew my Lord
Could be a hard man if occasion called . . .

I lay there in the sun, and nigh asleep,
Through half-closed eyelids watched the standard blow
Out at our stern above the aplaustron;
Which gilded ornament our poop adorned,
And also in some part served as a shield
Unto the helmsman sheltered 'neath its curve.

Dreaming, I saw the Imperial Eagle wave,
Blazoned in crimson on a jet black field;
Above me, from the mainmast streaming flew
The pennant of our Prefect . . . It displayed
The Black Horse of the Asturians on white ground . . .
Basking in the hot sun I dozed, and heard
The dancing waves upon our counter beat,
Yet faint their sound and very far away,
In mine ears soothing as a lullaby.
The sky was blue as though a sky in May,
Yet, banked on the horizon, rose great clouds
Of wondrous fleecy whiteness, towering high
Like to the snowy Alps' tall pinnacles,
Or bastions of Olympus seen in dreams.
By midday came we to the open sea,
That smiling greeted us. Its wavelets seemed
Scarce ruffled by the breeze; lightly they splashed
About our quinquereme's tall sides as she
Slipped through them sidling on her graceful way . . .
Our sails 'gan flapping and our course was stayed . .
Said Maximus, "Go, Navarch! Make more speed .
Set ye your well-trained rowers to their task . . .
Then pipe to dinner, an it please thee, Sir."

The rowers swiftly bent them to the oars

At the hortators' whistles clear and shrill . . .
Some of these men were prisoners of war;
Mop-headed Picts, whose naked bodies shewed
Strange painted forms of beasts and curious signs
Indented in their flesh and brightly stained;
Red-headed Scots, who sulking tugged their oars;
Broad-chested fair-haired Saxons; German youths;
Who by war's fortune must spend strenuous days
Of wretched toil to aid their enemies.
Others were Romans sentenced to the oar
For dangerous deeds against the Commonwealth . . .
Men of good birth, amongst the baser sort
Of vulgar rogues, did expiate their crimes
In misery and squalor . . . All alike
Herded in deep and common wretchedness.
Not like a trader's slaves the oarsmen rowed . . .
So many to an oar of equal length . . .
These in five tiers sat ranged, not all abreast,
But one behind the other on the bench,
Sloped like a slanting stairway, were close placed . . .
In the three lowest tiers below the deck
The oars were shorter, and each man gripped one
With which he rowed alone, none aiding him;
But on the upper banks I saw there pulled
Five men one oar, for these were heavy sweeps,

A good twelve[7] cubits long, so I was told . . .

From the five banks the long oars sudden dipped
Into the waves, then rising, flashed and gleamed
As though real diamonds dripped off their blades,
Not just the water-drops that from the sun
Had borrowed radiance and deceiving shone.
That these men should keep true and perfect time,
The lusty boatswains piped a cheery tune
On their shrill flutes; for some hortators had
Small silver flutes, others stout oaken staves
With hammer heads, wherewith they beat the time . .
But if nor flute nor stave had due effect,
And some unlucky wretch missed the right stroke,
Or failed to put his strength into the pull,
Faustus, the ship's Portisculus,[8] who was
The Hortators' chief Pausarius, bade his mates
Use then the heavy whips unsparingly
With which each one was furnished. Then I saw
How round the naked shoulders of those knaves
Who seemed to shirk the loaded leathern thongs
Coiled with a stinging force that made them shriek
And bend in terror to their hated task . . .
Sullen, despairing, desperate though they were,

[7] 18 feet. Cf. Torr, *Ancient Ships*, p. 50. [8] Boatswain.

They dared not slacken, could not mutiny,
For each man rowed fast chained unto his bench . . .
For my part I was glad when the wind rose,
A favouring following wind from off the shore,
And we with all sails set drew on our way;
For then the rowers rested, shipping oars;
Their hard-strained limbs relaxed, their throbbing heads
Bent low upon their breasts in short-lived ease . . .
And some I saw in sleep forgot their pains,
Huddled against their neighbours, crouching close;
And as dogs do, they started in their dreams,
Growled muttered curses, stretched cramped legs and arms . . .
But others sat grim-faced and sullen stared
Up at the decks . . . Till the hortators came
To dole out greasy soup in pannikins,
With hunches of black bread; and water poured
Into small buckets, one for every bench,
Which greedily enough the wretches drank,
Cursing each other for their tardiness
In passing that which they as nectar craved . . .
I noticed that the last man on one bench,
He who sat lowest, nearest to the sea,
Fared ill enough, for he gat nought to drink,

His neighbour having drained the bucket dry . . .
At which he swore, then laughed right horribly,
And called out to the boatswain passing by,
Raised on a gangway, who fresh buckets bare,
" Give me some drink, or, by the flames of Dis,
Ye'll lack an oarsman shortly . . . maybe two . . .
For I will throttle Priscus here ere I
Choke with my thirst . . . The greedy thrice-cursed swine
Has stolen my share of water . . . Don't ye hear?
Oh! By the Infernal Gods! May ye be parched
For all Eternity! . . . May your hard hearts
Be eaten raw by Cerberus! " . . . He growled,
And shook a threat'ning fist, strained at his chain
That by the middle held him to the plank,
Then snarling crouched, by sudden panic seized,
As with an answering oath the hortator turned,
Whirling the hissing thongs with practised hand,
And caught him three sharp blows about his ribs,
So that he doubled up with the fierce pain
And writhing groaned . . . Again he raised his head,
But dared not curse . . . In his fierce frenzied eyes
I saw a gleam as of some maddened wolf
Snared in a trap; then came such fearful look
Of abject, hopeless, frightful misery,

That I felt scared, and all ashamed to see
Steeped in such shameful sink of vile despair,
One, who though tarnished, worn by crime and pain,
Yet in his features kept some semblance faint
Of what he once had been . . . a man well-born,
Of noble bearing and a gallant air . . .
Now with black sullen looks he sat and stared
With haggard eyes; his face still wrung with pain
And very white . . . His head fell on his breast . . .
Then I, in my quick pity, cried aloud,
"A shame! . . . A shame!" At which the boatswains
laughed,
And e'en the galley-slaves did mocking grin . . .
Called Maximus, who also saw this thing,
" Give that man drink; and give him thine own wine . .
Go thou thyself without for seven days!
Hortator, thou dost wrong to misuse men
Who lie thus at thy mercy . . . 'Tis ill-done
To weaken those upon whose stalwart arms
We must rely when fail the favouring winds . . .
Aurelius! See thy slaves be better fed,
Mix henceforth with their water some good wine . . .
We shall want all their strength kept in reserve . . .
See that this man is not whipt thus again,
Nor any other save he shirk his work . . .
I like not harshness an there be no cause."

The Captain bowed, and with an angry frown
Bade the Pausarius bear these words in mind;
He with sharp words at the hortators swore,
Who grumbled much and cursed the galley-slaves.

Meanwhile I watched the cause of all this coil . . .
I saw a flush creep o'er the rough tanned cheeks
Of the poor wretch as he looked longingly
At the sour wine . . . I marked his bloodshot eyes
Look up at Maximus, then drop in haste . . .
And now a fiery red suffused his face
As down his cheek there trickled slow a tear . . .
Impatiently he dashed it off . . . and swore,
" Cursed be the wine, the giver, and my thirst . . .
Ye Gods! That I must take from that man's hand
Relief, who once was higher placed than he . . .
Now am I naught but dirt beneath his feet . . .
He throws me dregs to increase mine infamy . . .
Ah! If he knew me 'twere too deep a shame!
To bear his scornful pity and contempt
Too great a punishment . . . Ill luck pursue,
And blast him, Fortune! . . Sea! Take thou his wine . .
And yet, I cannot . . . It was kind of him,
And I am sore athirst . . . I'm a weak fool! . . .
I'll drink confusion to this ship and crew " . . .
Gasping, he drank, and drained the beaker dry;

Then looked up furtively with anxious eye . . .
But Maximus had turned upon his heel,
And, if he heard, he made no further sign.

Said Theodosius, with a shrug, " Dear friend,
Most noble Colleague and my General,
Were it not wise to leave these naval men
To manage their affairs as seems them best?
Slaves who are pampered well may dangerous grow . . .
What sayest thou, Aurelius? " He replied,
Looking at Maximus uneasily . . .
Who stood there smiling, yet with a bent brow . . .
" Tribune, thou sayest well . . . Harshness alone
Can keep these scoundrels steady at the oars . . .
Pardon me, Prefect, that I speak my mind,
But I have had experience of the dogs " . . .
Said Maximus in level tones and cold,
" Do thou, Aurelius, that which thou art told . . .
Theodosius, by thy leave, I would remind
My friend and Colleague that I'm in command . . .
By that friend's father have I been sent here
To keep due order . . . And, by God! I will
Keep order 'mongst my friends as 'mongst my foes . . .
Nor shall my word by officer of mine
Be questioned thus again " . . . Smiling he turned
And grasped the hand of Theodosius who

Flushing, half angry, gripped his in return . . .
" Forgive me, comrade . . . Thou dost know me one
Jealous of interference . . . Yet thou know'st
I love thee, Theodosius . . . Come below,
And we will pledge each other and renew
Our firm unfailing friendship . . . How say'st thou?
Oh, I will take thy warning as 'twas meant,
And thou shalt find me strict . . . I'll not relent
When justice doth forbid it . . . But, my friend,
May Heaven preserve me from thy Judgement-seat
When thou art older grown; who now, though young,
Doth show such zeal for stern harsh discipline!
Nay! At thy mercy, friend, I would not lie
Though I'd the chance of winning all the world!
We never shall agree on this vext point . . .
When I am strict thou wilt be lenient;
When I show some small kindness thou dost chide . . .
Let us agree that come what may betide
We will be friends through all " . . . Laughing, they
went
Hand grasping hand, nor seemed they ill content.

I saw the slave watched the pair furtively;
Then heard him groan as sullenly his head
Fell on his breast, and he sat very still.

ADVENTURE VII.

How Mela the Mariner told Quintus of the Isle Ogygia and its Wonders, and of the Island of the Dead.

The hot sun made me now nod drowsily;
I curled up on the deck right cosily
And soon I slept and dreamt of perilous seas,
Of ventures hazardous, and of sweet ease
Won by hard toil; and in my dreams I saw
Fair lands and strange, and marvels magical . . .

When I awoke I found the sun still high,
The sea grown rough; the breeze, yet favouring,
Had risen slightly, that the aplaustron[1]
And its fair ornaments did roll and bend,
Saluting thus the Genius of the waves.
I ventured forward, creeping cautiously
Lest the Proreta saw me, but no man
Denied me passage . . . Still the rowers slept,
Or idle sat in listless misery . . .
No officers I saw, but voices heard
Where in the cabin they sat drinking wine . .
The Steersman took no notice, nor dared I
Speak to that stern-faced one who held the wheel

[1] *Lat. Aplustre, Gk.* Aphlaston, Cf. C. Rutilius Namatianus, *De reditu suo*, p. 151, ed. and trans. G. F. Savage Armstrong.

Lest evil came of it . . . Amidships sat,
Cross-legged upon the lower deck, a man,
One of the mariners, who was employed
In mending a spare sail . . . He looked at me
With little twinkling eyes as black as sloes,
And over his bronzed face crept a sly smile . . .
He growled a greeting not ill-humouredly,
" Art restless, youngster? When as old as I
Thou'lt be content to sit and meditate
Upon the comforts of a quiet life;
But thou art young and mischievous as yet . . .
Hast been to sea before? Thou dost not feel
This lean Sea-mare of ours when she doth reel
And wallow in the trough of these high seas?
Come down, my lad, and speak with me awhile,
Who am known far and wide by sailors all
As Mela the Far-travelled, son of him,
Baratès called, who was a Palmyrene . . .
A Syrian soldier who to Britain came
As Legionary Standard-bearer; then,
On his discharge, as merchant sailed the seas,
Selling such wares as pleased the troops right well . . .
Rich silks and dainty comforts from the East,
And pretty slave-girls out of southern climes,
Brought he to solace exiles far from home . . .

My Sire Baratès was a man well known
And in good favour in the British Realm;
Long years he dwelt at South Shields near the Wall.[1A]
My mother was a well-born British dame,
Regina called, a Catvellaunian . . .
Who, stolen as a child, was sold for slave
Across the High Seas, in Armorica.
Baratès bought her in the Mart at Rennes,
And brought her back to Britain. Loving her,
He made her first his freedwoman, then wife . . .
But she died young . . . He mourned her all his life
Who was in truth a gentle kindly soul.
In me, their child, do East and West unite . . .
My father often praised his Syrian clime
And grumbled at the British fog and snow;
But I love well my mother's native land,
Where I was born and where I hope to die . . .
But who mayst thou be, my young Liticen?
Half Briton by thy looks, e'en as myself? ''
I told him then my birth, that I was bred
On the East Coast and dwelt at Colchester . . .
'' And I can sail a boat and know the tides
Down Colne and out e'en to the Blackwater! ''
Said I with no small pride . . ''Aye! Can ye then? . .

[1A] Cf. Bruce, *Hdbk. Roman Wall*, 8th Ed., p. 246.

Don't let our Navarch hear the same, my son!
Or he will have thee sure for his own man . . .
He's keen on snapping up smart sailor-lads,
And thou dost look a handy sort o' chap " . . .
Somewhat abashed I said, " Good mariner,
Tell me what land lies yonder on our lee,
Where that great headland dimly rises there? "
Quoth he, and looked long 'neath his tarry hand,
" Why, that is sure the Isle o' Beans, my boy;
Or maybe it is Thulè, or beyond . . .
Perchance Hy Brasil it may prove to be,
But that lies southward in the Summer Sea . . .
I should not wonder Basilea 'twere,
Or Abalus, whence amber comes in Spring
Borne on the flood from the Encrusted Sea " . . .
He stopped, and looked at me through half-closed eyes . . .
Then said I angrily, " Thou mockest me!
How can it be all these? I don't believe
There are such places " . . Laughing, said he, " Nay?
Maybe there are not . . . And, belike, I lie . . .
Some folk would call it the Mull of Kintyre . . .
Yet in my day, lad, I have seen strange sights,
And travelled far beyond the Land o' Dreams,
So to some islands came called by such names . .

Maybe 'twas fantasy . . . But beyond that ness,
Far out[2] and north of Thulè there doth stretch
A sluggish ocean where sea, land, and air
Are not divided, but like jelly-fish
Compounded are of some thick substance which
Bars farther passage . . . I have seen the same . . .
Through it one cannot either walk or sail,
And all that part the Cimbri Cronium call,
The Frozen Lake, or Water of the Dead,
Morima Rusa . . . Not far from that sea,
Upon the shores of Abalos, I've seen
The natives of those coasts pick golden glass
From out the shallow pools at the ebb-tide
So light that it doth float and roll about
Upon the surface . . . Amber it is called;
Some honey-coloured, some as white as wax . . .
Sure thou hast seen it carved in pretty beads,
Gracing great ladies' slender, proud-held necks? ''
I nodded . . . " Well, these same beads I have seen
Worn by the Brython Chieftains; wisely too,
For amber is a gift sent by the Gods . . .
Apollo's tears, when he from Heaven came
To dwell as exile in the northern gloom . . .
This amber doth protect men when alive,

[2] Cf. Strabo, II. 142.

And when they die it serves to guard their souls
And pay their passage to the other world . . .

Hast never heard their song? How goes the lay?[3] . . .
' The leader, the wolf of the holm, goeth wreath-decked,
His temples encircled with ringlets of amber . . .
Oh! Precious the beads of the honey-hued amber,
Well worth a banquet of foaming red wine! '

Ah! They would want the amber beads, my son,
When their souls ventured on the last lone way
Through the Hercynian gloom that has no light
Save that of luminous birds that fly by night.[4]
Yet, an they press on boldly without fear,
Maybe at last they'll sight the Blessed Isles
That lie to Westward of the Setting Sun . . .
I sailed there once . . . Oh, many years ago,
When as a boy I wandered by the sea
Near Benn Edair, that is the Hill of Howth . . .
Finding a curagh, a trim skiff enough,
Lie on the strand, I stepped therein to sleep;
For she was high and dry upon the beach,
The day was hot and I felt disinclined
To do the work to which I had been set.

[3] Cf. Aneurin "*Gododin*," st. 4.
[4] Elton, *Origins* . . . 2nd ed. p. 80.

When I awoke I found the skiff afloat;
Nor had I aid nor need of sail or oar,
For the wind driving o'er the sea so wrought
That safe and dry, unharmed, the skiff bare me
Across the ocean far, past strange fierce shapes
Of frightful sea-monsters . . . The great waves rolled,
High-reared, above my head; and I was tossed
Up to their crests and hurled into their troughs
While all the sky seemed shaking, till I came
To where the great waves stilled, the sea grew calm,
And all around I saw a wide morass.
Now in the marshes that fringe this Dead Sea[5]
Live queer and monstrous folk with horses' heads;
Others with flapping ears that to the ground
Reach trailing clumsily. Some dogs' heads have
And are one-footed, yet right swiftly glide,
And glittering shew as though made of fine gold . . .
Foul-natured things of cursèd kind they be,
That do devour the flesh of men; they breed
Cattle and fowls distorted like themselves;
Griffins with lions' heads and eagles wings;
Bulls that have fishes' fins and flapping tails . . .
Oh! many an ugly monster I did see . . .

[5] Cf. Mandeville and Antonius Diogenes, "*Wonders beyond Thule*" (Epitome, Photius Myriob. 355). Also, Elton, *Origins* . . . p. 78, *note 2*, Tacitus, Annals II. c. 24, "German:" c. 17, c. 46. P. Mela III. c. 6.

I was right glad when my skiff floated by
And the tide bare me on across the main.

Far out at sea the Isle Ogygia lies,
To reach it men must westward sail five days
From Britain's coast, and other islands fair
Lie just beyond, a little farther on;
Behind the Rhiphœan Hills concealed they lurk,
Beyond the icy touch of the North Wind,
Nearer to where doth set the summer sun.

I woke from sleep to find the rippling waves
Had gently borne me to a wondrous Isle.[6]
Lovely its strand in truth appeared to me,
Adorned with fragrant apple-trees 'neath which
The grass grew thick, strewn with forget-me-nots;
And 'neath the rosy blossoms limpid wells
Bubbled, with golden wine, not water, filled . . .
How fair I thought the brightness of that wood
Where Spring and Summer as fond sisters dwelt;
For 'neath the white and pink-flecked bloom there hung
Great golden pippins; others, crimson-cheeked,
With emerald and lemon colour streaked.
Now many fruit-trees ringed about these wells,

[6] Cf. Adventures of Art, etc. (*Echtra Art*, and Boswell's "*Irish Precursor of Dante*," p. 136).

'Mongst which I saw thick-clustering hazel-trees,
Or so they seemed, whose mellow golden nuts
Mingled with the red apples' comeliness;
And these fair trees their purple leaves dropped down,
With fluttering scarlet blossoms, in those wells;
And little bees of dainty loveliness,
Clad in soft downy fur of cinnamon,
Streaked some with sable, some with tawny bands,
Hummed with low crooning drowsy singing sound,
Hovering about the blooms. Hard by a house,
Thatched with birds' wings, white, yellow and deep blue,
With crystal doors I saw and posts of bronze;
Beyond which rose a great and lofty dun,
Ringed by a bronze stockade where stood a Hall
Wattled with silver, thatched with white swans' wings;
Its beams of bronze fair-fashioned; and its doors
Of shining copper reinforced by brass . . .
I marked how half the roof was not yet thatched,
And that the envious currents of the air
Snatcht off and whirled the feathers far away;
Yet swiftly rode some faery horsemen there
On wingèd steeds the mischief to repair,
Bringing fresh feathers, garnered carefully,
To thatch that roof as white as ivory.

The Hall by marble courts was girdled round,
Wherein grew flowers; but in the largest garth
A fountain played whence five streams rippled forth.
Here many warriors drinking stood, and maids
Served them in golden cups and drank themselves . . .
The sound of water falling from these streams
Was sweeter in mine ears than minstrels' songs . . .
Then there came one who bare a silver cup
And on his head wore a bright golden helm,
'Neath which his curly yellow hair streamed down
Over his shoulders. Purple-cloaked was he;
At his broad belt hung a gold-hilted sword;
Slung o'er his left arm was a gold-rimmed shield,
And in that hand he grasped a five-pronged spear,
Therewith a net of golden silk entwined . . .
" Welcome! " quoth he, " unto the Isle of Wells,
The Pleasant Plain, Magh Mell, the Land o' Dreams . .
Drink, stranger! And stay with us " . . . Nothing loath,
I from the curagh leapt out on the beach,
Hasting to meet the warrior; but as I
Stepped on the green-sward and stretched forth my hand
To take the cup, a maiden slipped between . . .
A comely wench clad in soft apple-green

Silk tissue, sprinkled with bright flecks of gold . . .
" Drink not! " she cried, " That wine with water
mixed
That is from Lethè drawn, lest thou forget
Thy native land and lie amongst the dead.
He doth desire that thou shouldst share his watch,
Who is a warder of the Underworld " . . .
At which with mocking smile he turned away . . .
" Drink rather this! " She held a crystal cup . . .
" This from the second of these springs is filled " . . .
I took the cup and tasted the rich wine,
For so it seemed, that in the chalice gleamed
Like golden amber . . . " Now," said she, ' Know thou
That thou art safe, nor in Oblivion's net
Shalt thou be snared, for thou hast drunk to-day
Of Memory's draught . . . This is the Ogygian Isle[7] . . .
Here dwell descendants of those Greeks who came
Long time ago with Herakles, and found
Subjects of Kronos living on this isle . . .
That Kronos whom the Romans Saturn call,
But whom the Gael by other names revere.
Some as the Dagda hail the Gracious God,
Some call him Beli, Lord of Flaming Fire . . .

[7] Cf. Plutarch: *De Facie in Orbe Lunæ*, ed. Wyttenbach, IV. 808, trans. A. O. Prickard, pp. 43-4.

Beli Buada, the Victorious Death,
Who is Cromm Cruaich, Bent One of the Mound . . .
And some Manannan name him, who makes gold
The wheat for farmers' sakes, whom he loves well . . .
Yet other names has he, but these suffice
If to the God thou wouldst make sacrifice . . .
These Greeks I speak of mixt with the new folk
Of kindred race and tongue, and, sooth to tell,
By that same mingling brought again to life
The old Hellenic spirit that seemed quenched . . .
Therefore we honour first great Herakles,
But also worship Kronos, once the Lord
Of Gods and men . . . When his star doth appear . . .
That we have named the Shining One, but they,
The elder race, do call the Night-Watcher . . .
Which unto Taurus doth return again
When thirty years on Earth have come and gone,
Then Kronos wakes and strange events occur . . .
Then folk pass from this land and others come,
Even as thou hast, to our island home.
Seest thou that cave, that lies deep in yon dell
With ferns o'erhung, that faces to the sea?
There Kronos, banished by his rebel sons,
Lieth at rest, soft soothed and charmed to sleep
By that strange warder whom thou seest sit

Piping beneath the shadow of an oak . . .
The Titan-born Briareus, who has
A hundred hands, and every hand is set
To make sweet music. He some kinship claims
With this same Kronos, whom he safely guards
By the decree of Zeus nor dare release . . .
In that gold-tinted cavern the God lies
That is soft-lined with porous pumice-stone.
In lieu of chains his bonds are forged of sleep;
Thus Zeus devised, who would his father spare
Indignity and shame . . . When he doth wake,
Which grace is sometimes granted by his son,
Ambrosia by the birds is brought to him;
For though a captive he doth royally fare . . .
The birds that are his stewards to and fro
Fly through the crevices high in the cave;
The ambrosia that they bear fills all this Isle
With a sweet fragrance from the rock distilled . . .
And Genii wait upon the God's demands
Who were his comrades in those bygone days
When he was the true King of Gods and men.
Now these at times utter weird prophecies,
Of which some things prove true and others false,
But Kronos sleeping lies wrapt in his dreams . . .
What Zeus premeditates doth enter in

His slumb'ring mind . . . His spirit loves it well,
And in these wondrous visions he oft yearns
To know yet more of the Eternal Will . . .
Which further knowledge shall not be withheld
When sleep has stilled his wild barbaric heart,
His soul's fierce stirrings, his Titanic mood,
And naught in him remains but that which proves
Right royal, pure, divine and unalloyed . . .
Then many hidden things shall Time thus learn
That in due course he shall to men disclose . . .
Meanwhile he sleeping dreams and longing yearns . . .
Sometimes he wakes and helps to judge the dead,
Who, coming to this isle, are 'fore him led.
He doth repeal or ratify the doom
That Minos gave, that Rhadamanthus urged . . .
For who more fit than Saturn can there be
To pass upon man's deeds the last decree?
What Time pronounces good shall long endure,
What Time condemns shall perish, that is sure.
Thus Kronos, though imprisoned, still wields power . .
Yet never may he see the upper air . . .
If he escaped this world would fade away,
And earth were not, nor sea . . . If Time should fly,
Unchecked, unnoted, from all bonds set loose,
Then with his loss would crumble this our world

And vanish, swallowed by Eternity . . .
For we are mortal and are circumscribed
Even as Time, and as Time dreams, dream we . . .
He lingers and we laze . . . He flies, we speed . . .
Nor may we break his bonds, nor ours, till dawns
The glorious day when all things are set free.

Meanwhile this Isle lies on Earth's farthest edge
In realm of Faery and of Fantasy . . .
It[8] is a fair land, not too cold or warm;
'Void of all noisome wind and hurtful air,'
Blissful and pleasant is its temperature.
Its people's habitations are in woods
And shady groves of wholesome fruitful trees,
Where they revere the God in loneliness
Or worship him in gathered companies . . .
No discord know they, nor are aught acquaint
With any sickness . . . When they have grown old
And weary of the feast of life they go
To make good cheer; their bodies then anoint
With sweet well-savoured ointments, so repair
Unto a cliff high-reared above the waves;
Thence from a certain hallowed rock leap down
Into the arms of Shonè, the deep sea,

[8] Cf. Pliny, Hist. Nat. IV., c. 12, trans. P. Holland: and Elton, *Orig. Eng. Hist.* pp. 87-89.

And find therein their happy sepulture . . .
Until that need arise they live in peace.
Six months they have when there is one long day . . .
They in the morning sow what's reaped at noon,
And gather fruits from trees at eventide
That blossomed with the dawn, nor lack they aught . . .
But after follows night as long again,
When the sun sinking from them hides his face
Nor shews himself till the appointed time.
Then with sad songs of sorrow they go down
Into their caves and there close sheltered lie
Until in six months' time once more dawns day.
Now doth that hour draw near, and thou must fly,
Else wilt thou share our long captivity . . .
This island is the border land 'tween Earth
And that dim shadowy Kingdom of the Dead
That lies beyond the ken of mortal men " . . .

I hastened to my skiff that stranded lay
High on that golden shore and pushed her down
Into the rippling water with a hand
That trembled slightly, for I was adread,
Not liking the strange mist that crept around,
Nor the pale maiden's tale of fantasy . . .
" Who art thou?" murmured I, " Wilt come with me?

For I will leave this Isle of Mystery
Ere the long night falls on it " . . . Said the maid,
" I am called many things by many men,
But my true name is *Credè Firalaind;*[9]
And I will come to thee at times in dreams,
Or when thou walk'st apart from thine own kind,
Close-wrapt from all the world in reverie . . .
Till then farewell! I come not now with thee " . . .

I heard her voice no more nor saw her face,
Nor aught but mist and flying scud of spray . . .
The Island vanished from my sight and I
Was tossed in terror on the stormy sea . . .
I fell asleep, or swooned, and knew no more
Till I awoke and found the skiff ashore
E'en where I boarded her; and high and dry
She lay upon the beach . . . The sun was low,
And I was frightened, hungry and a-cold;
So I went home in doleful mood to take
My wages that were due for misspent hours,
Nor did my father keep these back from me,
But paid me well and truly " . . .
Then said I,
Looking at Mela's wrinkled knotted brow

[9] The "truly beautiful." Cf. *Adventures of Art.*

As he sat gazing into vacancy,
" Hast thou seen her again? . . . And what mean'st
thou
By thy strange tale of Dead Men's Land that lies
Beyond the other Isle? " He shook his head
And frowned on me, as grumpily he said,
" I will tell thee no more . . . I've told too much . . .
Of that pale maiden I have naught to say . . .
Thou mockest me . . . Go hence! " . . . Said I, " No, no!
Good Mela, I mock not . . . Tell on, I pray."
Said he, " Believe this then, or think I dream . . .
I care not which . . What are thy thoughts to me? " . .
In those far Western Isles to which we sail[10]
Are scattered villages wherein men dwell,
Earning their bread by hard and swinking toil
As labourers and tillers of the soil,
But most are fishermen . . . Now one told me,
Who was an honest man . . . I knew him well . . .
He was our pilot for a score of years . . .
Hector his name, the son of Donegal;
That they have secret duties laid on them
Which they are bound by oath not to avoid . . .
An oath sworn to the Druids of their land
That binds each one when he is full-grown man . . .

[10] Cf. Procopius: *De Bell. Goth.* IV. c. 20, and Souvestre, *Les Derniers Bretons*, I. 37.

To each in turn there comes a certain call,
And he must do his part, nor shrink nor fail.
At night-time comes the summons weird and dread;
When home from sea the weary sore-spent man
Sits by his hearth and drinks his heather-ale,
Or mends his nets and listens to a tale
Of mirth or sorrow, or perchance a song.
His wife and children huddled round the glow
Of the peat-fire do listen eagerly
Unto the wandering minstrel's merry tunes;
The younger folk begin to sing and dance
As laugh and jest go round . . . Then suddenly
The door is shaken though there is no wind,
And now a breeze doth rise that whistling goes
About the house, and through the cracks creeps in;
And folk hear voices indistinct and low . . .
Strange voices whispering about the door,
Calling and pleading . . . At the window-pane[11]
Comes ghostly tapping, tapping soft yet plain,
And a faint wailing . . . " 'Tis the curlews' whine,"
Says the good wife, " Heed them not, husband mine.
Come! Eat thy supper . . . Then to bed and dream
Of summer coming . . . Of fine hauls of fish . . .
Of wrecks upon our shore that we grow rich . . .

[11] Pane of horn or bladder.

Of us two courting . . . What thou wilt, good man . . .
Why dost thou rise and listen, thus distraught?
I tell thee thou'rt mistaken . . . There is naught . . .
Naught but the wind that knocketh on the door,
And sways the hanging ivy 'gainst the pane,
Then whooping shrieks along the hollow lane . . .
The sea-gulls crying down by the sea-shore
Are what we hear . . . Oh! It is nothing more . . .
Then hearken not . . . Go not . . . There is no need.
'Tis bitter cold to-night . . . I'll pack the fire,
Here have we peat enow . . What's that? . . A scream . .
Surely the Evil One doth ride abroad!
O Hector! Go not out! " . . . But he must go,
Shivering, unwilling, leaving the hearth's glow,
Drawn by some force that he may not resist,
For on the moaning breeze he hears them call . .

' Come out! And ferry us across the sea
Unto the Land of Shadows and of Dreams . . .
Amber we bring that thou lack not thy fee,
And crystals from the mountain brooks and streams . .
Dost thou not hear how in the howling wind
Our sad complaining voices rise and fall?
Weary of waiting are we one and all . . .
Our friends have gone, we cannot stay behind . . .

Haste, Ferryman! Or we shall miss the tide
That ebbing now would bear us out to sea . . .
Oh, tarry not! Why must we waiting bide?
Earth-bound we suffer, may we not go free? . . .
Hast thou no pity in thy stony heart
That thou wouldst hinder those who would depart?
We have come far, and farther yet must go . . .
Of our long journey none the end doth know . . .
Weary are we, and the night-wind blows chill
Across the marsh, down by the lonely mill . . .
Hark! How it rushes screaming o'er the wold!
We fain would be at rest . . . Oh, we are cold . . .
Are very cold and shiver . . . Ferryman!
Wilt thou not come, for now the night grows old?
Come forth, nor keep us! For we must be gone
Ere the shrill cock crow to salute the morn . . .
Wailing we wait thee, wandering all forlorn . . .
Come with thy comrades, Ferryman, and row
The souls of us dead men where we must go' . . .

Then Hector rose, constrained by fear, and went
Forth from his hut across the barren waste,
And with him went his neighbours, e'en as he
Bearing their lanterns, each face pale and wan
In the dim wavering light . . . yet no man saw

The strangers in their midst, if such there were,
For none appeared, nor seemed there aught behind . . .
But at their heels and slipping by their sides
They knew there marched a ghostly company
Whom they saw not, yet heard faint murmuring,
And felt quick twitching clutches at their sleeves,
And whispering in their ears, and breath that came
Chill on their cheeks, then scorched as though a flame . .
And flutt'ring heard they as of thousand wings
Beating the air . . . Their hearts were filled with dread
As in the darkness tolled far distant bells
Which they knew rang for passing of the dead . . .
Shudd'ring, in silence, went these fishermen
O'er the waste moorland, through the bare black woods,
Where the wind whirled the fallen blood-red leaves . . .
With hasty steps they crossed the dismal marsh
Down to the gleaming sands, nor saw they aught
Save darting fires that rose from out the fen,
Then hovering, flickered wildly, so went out . . .
And no man there dared to his neighbour speak,
But all went dumb, oppressed with heavy fear,
Through rising mist and darkness cold and drear . . .
So came they to the shore and there perceived
Ships lie in readiness, but void of men . . .
Nor were these their own skiffs, but craft unknown,

Fashioned in other manner than their own . . .
All trembling crept the fishermen aboard
And took their seats, and laid hold of the oars,
For sails there were not; and they heard the tread
And trampling of a mighty phantom host
That after them thronged in. Then sank the boats
E'en to the gunwales and the rowlocks, so
Scarcely a finger's length from the sea's edge
They floated heavy-laden . . . Yet the crew
Saw none aboard save only their scared selves,
Pale in the moonlight and the lantern-rays.

Now they pushed off and left their isle behind,
Rowing an hour . . . Though it seemed ten or more . . .
Until they came to a dim, shadowy shore
That no man there had ever seen by day . . .
For well these fishermen their islets know,
Each winding creek and inlet, wick and bay;
But this land save by night is never seen,
And then but rarely, as if in a dream . . .
And now they heard a deep and hollow voice
Call out as Herald doth at a King's Court,
Announcing all their unseen passengers,
Each one by name . . . And if there were great Kings,
Or noble Lords, or Bishops, each was called

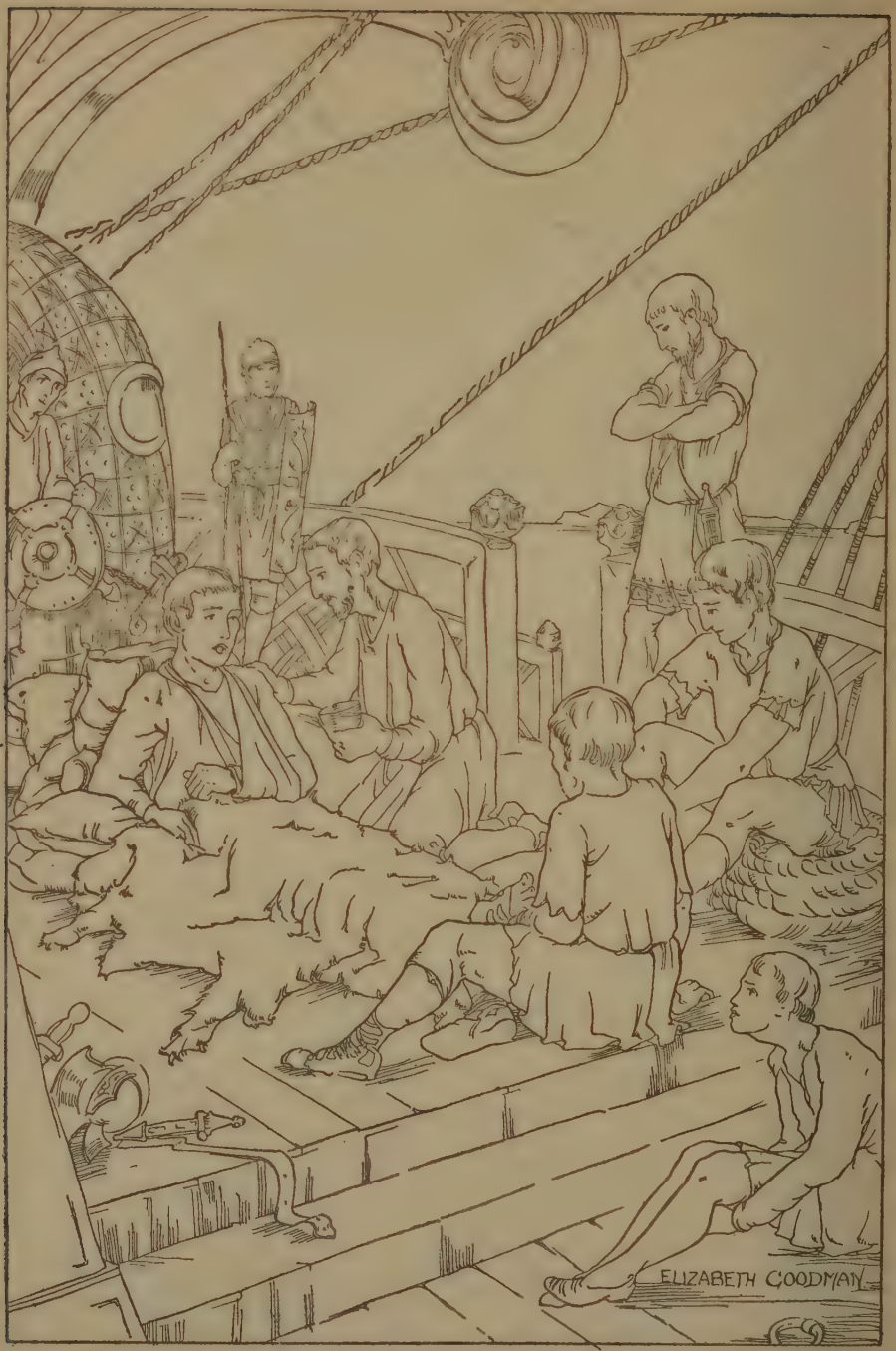
By his true title and his dignity,
And it was told aloud from whom he sprang,
To which race he belonged, his father's name;
And women by their husbands' names were called
If they were married, maidens by their own . . .
Soldiers were summoned, merchants, serving-men,
With artizans and labourers in their turn . . .
Rich men and poor men, thieves and beggars heard
Each man his name, nor might avoid that roll;
But one and all each dead soul forth must go
At that dread summons an it would or no . . .
Then rustling, murmuring, weeping, passed the souls,
Brushing against the rowers, who crouched low
Smitten with terror, as that spectral band
Swept flitting past them . . . Hector thought he saw
A craggy cliff loom up from out the mist,
Wherein a chasm yawned as of some cave,
In whose black gaping mouth there dimly shewed,
Between the glistening sea-weeds' trailing fronds,
Close-clustered bat-like forms that fluttered round,
Then floating on the wind were drawn within . . .
He and his comrades heard low mutterings,
And murmuring voices, whose soft sighing tones
Grew fainter by degrees and died away
In distant wailings, till no more their ears

Were vexed by the complaining of the souls;
But there was a great silence undisturbed,
Unbroken save by moaning of the waves
That entering this cave beat 'gainst its walls
With hollow booming noise continually . . .

The frightened crews in haste then rowed away
Back to their island. Hector never knew
How there he landed, how he gained his home,
Nor what became of those outlandish ships,
Nor whence had come his store of gilded glass . . .
For tight clutched in his hand were amber beads
And shining crystals that he thought but trash . . .
Nor in the morning knew his good wife aught,
Save that he had gone forth into the night
And come back ere the dawn a frightened wight
Who crept to bed with chattering teeth and swore
That ne'er again would he consent to row
Dead souls across unto the Devil's shore . . .
For so they call the Land of Mystery
To which they brought that ghostly company.

That's all I know, lad . . . Maybe 'tis but lies . . .
Hadst better run . . . Is't not thy Master's voice? ''
I rose and hurried aft, as on the wind

Came to mine ears my Prefect's clear high call,
"Haste, Quintus, haste! Where art thou, lazy boy?
Sleepest thou still? . . . Awake! We need thine aid . . .
Bring cushions quickly! Strew them on the deck . . .
Some flasks of Cretan wine, Falernian too . . .
Theodosius, lend thine arm . . . So, Marius, so . . .
Lean hard on me, my boy . . . Take time . . . Go slow . . .
Here shalt thou lie and at thine ease disclose
The tale thou long'st to tell and we to know."



"Marius tells his Tale."

(See page 297.)

ADVENTURE VIII.

How Marius told his Tale of how he sought Callanish in the Isle of Leog, and what happened there.

Now with a steady wind we westwards sailed,
Giving a wide berth to the land that lay
Upon our lee, that headland bleak and bare,
Called in the Celtic speech Mull of Kintyre,
Whereon stands high the ancient royal dun
Of Dalriad's Kings who rule the Alban land.
Far in our wake that shadowy ness yet loomed
When other land had vanished. Now saw we
Naught to the North nor West save open sea,
Yet stormy was it not, though somewhat fresh,
As if the Sea-Gods favoured our design.
Upon the poop lay Marius, pale and lean,
Propped up by cushions. Stronger now he seemed,
Though still he bare his left arm in a sling,
And his worn features yet shewed signs of strain.
By him Marcellus sat, from time to time
Giving him drink of the good Cretan wine.
Theodosius and my Master sat them down
To hear his tale; Aurelius stood hard by
With other officers . . . I crept near too,
And, unperceived, I listened open-eared.

Said Maximus, and his voice kindly rang,
" Now, Duplicar, thy tale! I'm glad, my lad,
That thou art here to tell it . . . Hasten not,
Nor overstrain thy new-found strength . . Take time . .
Thou hast done well and we are proud of thee."
Marius smiled, well pleased. Turning, he lay
Looking at Maximus, so told his tale
In a firm voice that faltered not, though low.

When I left thee, disgraced and shamed, I fled
Out on the heath in a wild mad despair
That winter night . . . Well, I won through the lines
Disguised as Attacot, and no man knew
That I was not of that barbaric race . .
Oh, I played Pict as though a native born . . .
So came I to the Western Estuary,
To the great City of the Celts that now
Men call Alclwyd, which we sailed by this morn.
Ye may remember, Sirs, that two years since
Count Theodosius took and held this town,
Which while so held was Theodosia called;
But finding that he could not keep the place
Without support from Rome, he did decide
To hand it over to the Alban King
To hold for Rome with customary dues.

He being lately dead, the burgh is held
By Eugen, grandson of old Cormac Finn,
Or, as the Brythons call him, Fincomarke[1] . . .
'Tis they that plot against the Roman State,
No friend to us is Eugen, General . . .
Thou must beware of him, though he doth seem
To be our firm ally . . . He plays a part . . .
Truly I heard strange rumours in Alclwyd,
Talk 'mongst the Attacots who thronged the town
Of Irish Scots, who had sought Leog's Isle,[2]
That lies 'twixt Erin and the Alban Coast.
From Erin came these men to plot and plan . . .
Their Dalriad kinsmen flocked to welcome them . . .
There they devised harm 'gainst the Roman Realm
And would entice the Brythons to their side . . .
At which reports I pricked my listening ears,
Making resolve to go West gathering news
Though it should cost my life. I hired a craft
And two skilled boatmen, saying I was bound
West for the fowling . . . That I had come late
And missed my fellows . . . That my Chief required
My presence on the Island . . . These men grinned
And took my gold . . . I had not much thereof . . .
Only my prize-money from last campaign,

[1] Cf. Hector Boece and Holinshed, for this King. [2] I. of Lewis.

And half of that I'd lost " . . . Theodosius smiled,
" Aye, we know well the way . . . Eh, Maximus? . . .
That hard-won gold can vanish . . . Dice will play
The very devil with a soldier's pay . . .
Come, thou'rt forgiven, lad . . Let's hear thy tale " . .
Marius laughed somewhat uneasily,
And looked at Maximus . . . Who sat unmoved;
Though all there knew why he was sent from Rome,
And that he loved not to recall those days
When he had gambled all his wealth away,
And lost his post thereby, his chance of fame,
His Emperor's trust . . . Now he smiled bitterly,
Looking at Theodosius steadily . . .
The younger man flushed red . . . " I meant no harm,
Fool that I am! My comrade, pardon me . . .
'Twas my quick tongue " . . . Said Maximus, " My
friend,
Thou hast but spoken truth . . . This lad and I
Have equal reason to acknowledge it . . .
Let that rest now . . . Tell on, O Duplicar! "
Then Marius, still confused, resumed his tale . . .

" So we sailed for five days and came at length
With wind abeam to Leog's rock-bound isle;
Up the west coast thereof we made our way.

The well-skilled boatmen every current knew,
Though now the wind was shifty, they steered so
That without mishap we drew nigh the land
Towards the loch that is called Carloway
In Northmen's tongue . . . For to this isle oft come
In summer time the Northern sea-robbers . . .

South of that inlet, I should think four miles,
There is a narrow bay, Loch Roäg called,
That runneth far inland between the hills . . .
And here is fishing good and plenteous found,
Here Gallan[3] whales and porpoises abound . . .
So great, so clumsy in their boisterous play,
As they disporting gambled in the sea,
That I began to think we all should drown . . .
Thereat my boatmen laughed and twitted me
For being inland bred.
We drew near land,
And I would have these men set me ashore
In some secluded cove, but they refused . . .
" Not so our bargain . . . Thou shalt leave this boat
When we Callanish reach and not before[4] . . .
Our skins would pay an thou shouldst prove a spy . . .

[3] Cf. Martin, *West Islands of Scotland* (Pinkerton, III. 576).

[4] Callanish or Callernish. Cf. Anderson, *Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 119; Mackenzie, Bk. of the Lews, p. 191, *seq.*

Thy business we know not, nor seek to know,
But thou shalt land upon Callanish Quay,
And there find out thy Master speedily,
Or take a new one . . . So, Sir! Say no more " . . .
I saw I could not move them, so sat still,
Marking how steeply fell the rugged shore.
From rocky barren heights down to the loch
The lower slopes were covered with brown heath
And short-cropped turf, whereon grazed goats and sheep.
In every valley cleft between the hills
Black firwoods grew, and lofty mountain pines
Reared their proud crests e'en as our Eagles shew
Borne high above our Legions when they charge . . .

We landed just ere sunset on the quay.
Before us stretched a strip of sandy land,
An opening 'tween the heights on either hand,
Where stood a fort upon a little mound,
A dun built of unmortared monstrous stones
Laid in a circle tapering to the top,
Right cunningly enlaced . . . Three storeys high
With triple walls, as I saw by and by.
Two sentinels strode forward and debarred
Our further passage. In the Pictish tongue

That Galloway Cruithni use they asked our names,
Our purposes, what passports? . . . I had none . . .
My guides produced some curiously carved stones
That had strange symbols on them; these sufficed
To pass them through . . Of me they made short work . .
Ere I could stammer out my tale they seized
And trussed me up as though a skewered fowl . . .
" A spy," growled one . . . The other grimly said,
" The Kings will settle soon this fellow's hash . . .
The last spy that came here King Heirgust staked
Out on the breakwater to scare the gulls . . .
Dost thou remember, Brude, how the chap squealed?
He lived four days, was't not? And cried in vain
That we should drown him . . . Aye . . . He bare his pain
Right poorly " . . . Said the other carelessly,
" I'd nigh forgotten . . . Many go that way,
And mostly make a fuss . . . This youth may shew
A better spirit . . . Well, we soon shall know . . .
Here comes King Heirgust to inspect the Works,
And with him Colla, Lord of Colonsay,
With Donald of the Isles and all their sons;
The Irish Princes and the Alban King . . .
Great chiefs and nobles . . . a whole host of them . . .
Stand back there, boatmen! Tavish, hold the spy! "
He stood to attention as these Lords drew near;

Of whom the first came Heirgust, the Pict King . . .
A young man, short, broad-shouldered and red-haired . .
With him his brother walked . . . I had seen them
When some time since they came unto Alclwyd
To treat with Theodosius . . . On the right
Strode one I knew not, but I heard Brude say
His name was Niall, Irish Eochaidh's son . . .
Eochaidh, Ard-Righ of Erin, not long dead . . .
A goodly-looking lad with golden hair.
Here, too, came young King Eugen, and with him
One, noble Maximus, whom thou knowest well . . .
Ethodius, his brave brother, he who served
With thee in Rome, in Gratian's Body-Guard . . .
Often enough I've heard thee speak of him ''—
" What he? '' said Maximus, " Ethodius there? Art
sure?
Bethink thee, Marius, what thou sayst! Who else?
I cannot think those two would play me false ''—
" Another friend of thine, Sir . . . Cradock's son,
Maurice of Cornwall, looking pale and stern . . .
Holding his arm and whispering in his ear
Strolled with him Conan, thy worst enemy . . .
At least I thought he was . . . but I know not . . .
He seems much changed '' . . . Young Theodosius said,
" What, Marius? Has that sly fox gulled thee so

That thou now seest him white, not black of hue? ”
Quoth then my Lord, deep wrapped in wondering
thought,
“Conan Meriadoc walked by Maurice close?
What does Black Conan in his company?
I thought him safe in Erin's Isle bestowed ” . . .
Said Marius wearily, “ I know not, Lord . . .
Later he helped me . . . Sent me back to thee . . .
The others I knew not . . . Right stately men,
Princes and Chieftains of the Picts and Gaels,
They came abreast of where the sentries stood,
Who swift saluted. Said the Pictish King,
“ Whom have ye here? Another cursèd spy?
Strip him and stake him . . . Stay! I'll question him . . .
Whence com'st thou, fellow? . . . What! Hast lost thy
tongue?
Bring him within! . . . We'll find him one anon . . .
Yet shall he lack that too ere all is done . . .
Stay not to bind his eyes . . . Our secrets he
May muse upon when twisting on his stake . . .
Let him shriek out our plans to the wild gulls,
And from the skuas' greedy beaks his eyes
Ransom with that great news . . . Maybe the birds
Will carry word unto the Roman Wall . . .
The curlews and the lapwings circling round

Shall join their cries to his . . . Three setting suns
Will span his life . . . The last one lived as long,
Did he not, Heirthorstan? '' His brother grinned,
And nodding eyed me . . . So we came within
A narrow way that led between high walls,
Then, slanting downwards, vanished through a door
Into the hill that rose athwart the path . . .
The keystone of that door my wandering eyes,
That hopeless scanned each object that we passed,
Saw to be formed of one huge sculptured stone,
That lay across two columns roughly hewn,
Carved with strange emblems; spirals, circles, stars . . .
Upon the threshold lay another slab
That also had these symbols traced thereon.
Inside, just seen, a yawning hole appeared . . .
A shaft sunk in the mound, with ladder hung
Yielding precarious foothold . . . I was slung,
With unceremonious haste, by a strong rope
Of twisted deerskin down this loathly hole . . .
The others at their leisure came below.
I thought the bottom never would be reached,
But, when at length they dropped me on the ground,
I wished that journey had been twice as long;
For now with thumps and kicks they pushed me on
Through a long narrow tunnel, down some stairs

That wound in the wall's thickness, till we came
With many a bumping jerk and muttered curse . . .
How far beneath the earth's crust I can't guess . . .
Into a gloomy vault that was ill-lit
With rude stone lamps, e'en as the passages.
Heirgust and all of them strode t'wards one end,
Where a high daïs rose from out the gloom.
I heard a far-off voice that grimly said,
" Give light, that we may see this daring wretch
Who would pry on our counsels " . . . At these words,
By some means I marked not, the vault was lit
With a white light as though the sun shone down,
And mine eyes saw this place was hung around
With wondrous tapestries. Huge carven stones,
Disposed as seats and benches, lined the Hall.
Two rows of columns black as ebony
Held up the vaulted roof . . . So high it seemed
That its extent was lost in shade and gloom . . .
Displayed upon the walls much armour gleamed
Of antique fashion.
But scant time had I
To look about me; roughly I was hurled
Upon my knees and held thus by the guards.
When I looked up I saw upon a throne
There sat in state a very ancient man,

How old I know not, but his span of years
Must sure have been as was Methuselah's!
He sat cross-legged, a tiny wizened thing;
His shining dome-like head had ne'er a hair,
But long and silvery hung his reverend beard
Down past his ankles coiled upon the floor.
Encircling his bald pate a diadem
Of twisted gold was set; a scarlet robe
Of finest samite clothed his antic frame.
Gnarled were his hands and bony like crows' claws;
Piercing his eyes, dark, fierce, with sullen flame
Gleaming 'neath shaggy eyebrows that stretched o'er
His wrinkled brow in one unbroken line.
I shuddered in good truth to see this shape
More like fantastic ape than mortal man.
On the stone seats the other Princes sat
In shadow of the pillars, for the light
Was centred in the middle of the Hall.
I had no eyes for any but this thing
That sat in judgement.
Heirgust, stooping, knelt
Right humbly at its feet . . . Quoth he, " Great King!
O Cormac Finn, Lord of all Alba! Thou
Who art called Ubthaire by the Western Gaels,
By us Thelargus, Conaire by the Celts,

But by the Brythons art called Fincomarke[5] . . .
For by a hundred honoured names thou'rt known . . .
Uncounted as thy years thy titles are;
Revered, adored by Cruithni, Brythons, Gaels,
O mayst thou rule for ever, Lord of Isles!
Judge thou this case, and question thou this man
Who has come hither to search out thy land."
Said then the Ancient in a quiet voice,
Clear and metallic, neither deep nor shrill . . .
Nor did its level tones with passion thrill,
But sounded cold and thin and far away . . .
" Be seated, Lord of Picts . . . Rise, stranger! Stand!
Shew us thy face, nor think thou canst conceal
Thine inmost thoughts . . . I have the power to know
That which is hid from lesser mortals . . . Speak!
What dost thou, Roman, here? What wouldest thou?
Why try to penetrate our mysteries,
In secret sneaking here as doth a thief? "
He spake good Latin, which amazed me much.
My guards drew back and I stood up abashed,
Feeling as might a mouse caught in a trap
Ere it was thrown to the expectant cat.
I spake in Pictish, making firm my voice . . .

[5] Cf. Grieve, *Bk. of Colonsay* . . . II., 385; Holinshed, Vol. V., p. 105; "*A verie agèd man*" . . . Boece, trans. Stewart, I. p. 540 (16, 805 and 16, 845-6).

Though inwardly perturbed and wondering much
What my fate would be ere the next hour passed . . .
" Lord, thou dost speak in riddles to thy slave;
Little know I of Latin, yet too much . . .
I, who am Pictish born and Pictish bred . . .
I am an Attacot, who late have come
From my forced service 'neath the yoke of Rome
Back unto Alba. Finding my home gone . . .
I lived on the East Coast . . . 'Twas all destroyed
By Roman mischief . . . hearing then some news
Of movement in the West I hither came
To find a leader in some Gaelic Chief,
Some Pictish Lord . . . Who will fight Romans, Sire,
For I would be revenged . . . Thus earn my hire.
Nor came I secretly, but openly;
Yet am I seized and treated as a spy! "
Said the old King right softly, " Friend, why lie?
Thine age shews plainly thou'st not served thy term . . .
Rome looses not so soon her hold on men
Who lusty are and strong and young like thee . . .
Do Attacots, who are of Pictish blood,
Have skins as white and smooth as thine . . . They are
Swarthy and hairy every one of them,
Or, if not black of hue, are fiery red . . .
Nor do true Picts pronounce their words like thee.

Who ever heard an Attacot say Pict!
They call themselves not Picts, but Cruithni, son . . .
Alas! I fear that trouble comes on thee;
Thy star doth fade drowned in thy poor deceit,
Though it lack substance it shall prove enough . . .
Thou art a Roman officer come here
To spy upon us . . . Here is one knows thee . . .
Stand forth! Lord Maurice of the Brython Land,
Tell us who this man is . . . A foe or friend
Of thine he surely is . . . I saw thine eye
Lighten with recognition not long since " . . .
In some confusion up sprang Maurice then,
His fair face flushed and angry, " King, I swear
This man is naught to me . . . I am come here
To speak with him whom men acclaim thine heir,
Thy grandson Eugen, Cairbre Cruithneach's son,
Crowned Under-King of Alba yesterday . . .
Also I heard that other Chiefs were here,
That Conan Meriadoc wished to treat
With Cornwall's Lord . . . My father sent me here
To meet the exiled Duke and hear his tale,
That I might bear his word to Maximus,
Who ruleth Cornwall in our young Queen's name . . .
We have no power to treat save by his leave."
With a slight flicker that was scarce a smile

The old King spake, " Lord Maurice, give his name . .
If he be naught to thee what matters then
The fate of a base spy . . . Thou knowest him . . .
Is he then come as secret go-between
To bear thee orders from this Maximus . . .
This upstart Roman General? " . . . I looked
In stolid wise at Maurice and none saw
The slightest warning signal 'tween us pass,
But each of us the other's purpose read
In one quick glance exchanged . . . That neither would
Betray his knowledge of the other man . . .
The Brython shook his head and calmly stood
Looking at Fincomarke with some disdain.
The old King said, still in his smooth soft voice,
" We must persuade our guest to find his tongue . . .
Latin or Attacot . . . It is all one;
He shall tell us just what we want to know . . .
Why he came here, and what force on the Wall
He left behind him, where its weak points are,
And what his General's plans . . . All that he knows
And more, may be, he'll gladly tell us soon;
And he shall humbly beg the boon of death,
Nor shall that be denied him . . . in due time! . . .
Send one to fetch the Druid Marven . . . Then
Bring that which helps to loosen silent tongues . . .

Life-giving fire, which holds the keys of death.''

Not long we waited ere we heard the sound
Of flutes and cymbals, and of tapping drums
Such as our Moorish cavalry do use,
While white-clad youths on reed-pipes dolefully
Did play a dreary measure solemnly.
Then up the middle of the Hall came one,
Robed, as their wizard priests are wont to be,
In long dalmatic to his ankles which
Was all of scarlet rich and gold brocade;
Gold bracelets had he on his bare bronzed arms,
A gold torque round his neck of twisted rings;
His white cloth mantle, speckled o'er with black,
He wore thrown back that all might see his dress;
Upon his head a gilded cap he wore
And golden ear-clasps had he . . . This I saw
With eyes made keen by dread . . . I'll not deny
That I was scared, Sir, by the glassy eyes
Of Cormac Finn, that old and withered King,
More like a corpse revived by magic art
Than living man . . . He kept them fixed on me
Till I nigh screamed . . . I saw as though I dreamed
That long procession from the shadows come
Of Fileys, Bards and Brehons, every one

In speckled robes, save twelve who went light clad
In bulls-hide coats and feathered flapping caps
With birds' wings waving. These came leaping on,
Tossing up swords with gold and crystal balls,
Which cleverly they caught and threw again . . .
Like to the buzzing of a myriad bees,
That on a summer's day forth from their hives
Fare on their busy errands and swift pass
And repass with a steady soothing hum
Their speeding fellows, so these whirring balls
Whirling in glittering mazes shining sped.
But the chief Druid walked with a proud air,
Solemn and slow, and in his hand a staff
Of ivory bare . . . Then each priest took his place
In a great circle there before the King,
And I, poor wretch, was centre of that ring.
From out the black shade of the pillars crept
Dark forms in leathern tunics, bare their limbs,
And some of them held ugly-looking things . . .
Vices and iron screws . . . Two of them bent
Beneath a brazier's weight . . . 'Twas glowing red . . .
Others held knives like those used to skin deer . . .
Then all my mind seemed blank, my brain awhirl;
I wondered which way they would test me first,
And what I'd do . . . Not thinking it was I,

But rather as though here some man should die
And I should see him, in a dream, unreal . . .
E'en when the old King raised his skinny hand,
Making a signal . . .whereon they seized me
And stripped me bare, so laid me helpless down
Before his feet . . . I felt no special fear.
I lay there numbed, yet something in me thought
To bite my tongue off ere they should get news
Of aught concerning our troops on the Wall.
I shut mine eyes, for now the brazier's glow
Too close, too fervent seemed . . . And for a space
They left me thus . . . No man there spake or moved.
But when I looked up marvelling I perceived
That every eye was fixed with horrid glare
Upon my face . . . Some with a grinning stare,
Some stonily . . . Their mouths were twitching too;
Half-smiling some, as though they licked their lips . . .
As I have seen dogs slaver o'er their bones,
Waiting their master's word these to devour . . .
Yet there were two stood there who looked aside;
One of whom, Maurice, and the other man
Ethodius, Eugen's brother . . . Also, I
Thought I detected in young Niall's eye
Some slight compassion, but King Eugen sat
As though a statue, on his lips a sneer.

And now I felt a darting qualm of fear . . .
A hatred of these brutes . . . A wish that they
Would make an end . . . Sudden desire to speak
Oppressed my mind . . To shout out babbling words . .
To curse them . . . Pray them to begin, be quick . . .

Oh, I know not . . . Nor will I think thereon . . .
Good Surgeon, give me drink . . . I grow so tired . . .

I did not speak, yet could not help but turn
And twist a little in my fast-tied bonds . . .
For they had trussed me tight again . . . Then said
King Cormac, "So . . . Why, thou art shivering,
friend . . .
And surely that is sweat runs down thy brow?
Wilt thou now speak, or must we have the truth
Wrung from thy very entrails? My Chief Priest
Doth tell the future and our fortune reads
From the quaint throes in which the victim heaves . . .
His duty is it to mark how thy blood
Shall flow about the altar, how thy limbs,
Distorted and convulsed, shall quivering plunge . . .
But long ere that thou shalt have known such pain
That thou shalt count thy death as priceless gain.
If thou speak out, then shalt thou unhurt stand,

Thy life intact, thy liberty reserved
For a short season only . . . Speak then, friend!
I have no wish for thine untimely death . . .
Thou art a young man, surely life is sweet? ”
I shook my head and laughed, “A death in life . . .
I thank thee, King, for naught . . . Thou thinkest me
A Roman born . . . Well, put me to the proof! ”
E'en as I spake my tongue dried in my mouth,
And in my breast I felt my heart beat fast;
The throbbing of my blood drummed in mine ears . . .
With a quick pang I thought, “ What fool am I!
I might have made some tale up, told some lie . . .
I should have humoured, not enraged, that fiend ” . . .
Too late! They stooped; one, gripping fast my hand,
Forced the clenched fingers open, held it up . . .
Another from the fire took out with tongs
Something that glowed . . A red-hot spike it seemed . .
But even as I ground my teeth, and sweat
Poured down my face, I heard Lord Maurice shout,
“ Hold, slaves! ” . . They waited, looking at the King,
Who stayed his hand, nor gave the signal dread,
But stared at Maurice . . . “ Lord! ” he hurrying said,
“ Harm not this lad . . . I know well who he is . . .
He hath a message he is sworn to give
To me, but not from Maximus he comes,

Nor knows he aught of the troops on the Wall . . .
He comes from Cornwall, from the Queen's own
Guard . . .
His name is Glaucus and he is a Greek,
Not Roman born, but certès, Roman reared " . . .
Said the old King in mocking tones, " How now?
What message then? . . So thou hast found thy tongue,
Lord Maurice, who art Envoy . . . Or, perchance,
Art thou too come to spy upon our plans,
Like this young rascal fellow? "
Maurice said,
" I came here to meet Conan, by request,
That I might hear his offer and report.
Likewise your proffers for firm peace, Lord King,
I hoped to learn . . . I am no treacherous spy . . .
This youth bears orders doubtless from my Queen.
Why he came here disguised I cannot say,
Save that he feared ill-greetings on the way
From Heirgust's Picts or thy wild Dalriads " . . .
Said Fincomarke, "Speak! Thou Queen's Messenger . .
Deliver now thy message . . . Over late
And prompted though it be . . . For we will hear . . .
Brude, place thy skewers in the fire again
That they be ready when required . . . Stand up!
And speak, O Glaucus! Who art now a Greek,

Not Attacot nor Roman, so it seems . . .
Scarcely need we relieve thee of thy skin,
So easily thou slipst it off and on! ''
Shivering with cold, and rage, and shame, I spake . . .
Still in the Pictish Gaelic, '' King! I came,
Sent to Count Maurice by our Lady Queen,
To bid him leave this Island and go home
To learn her altered will concerning things . . .
I was to see him privately, but naught
Was told of policy or state '' . . . The King
Laughed long, and chuckling sat . . . ''A messenger!
O loyal messenger! Thy token shew . . .
How knows Lord Maurice else if thou be true?
Prove, and at once, that thou art sent by her! ''
'' I've lost it, Lord,'' I muttered . . . ''A glass ring . . .
I dropped it in the scuffle on the Quay . . .
May be 'tis in my clothes '' . . . A guardsman knelt
And searched my garments at King Cormac's nod . . .
Rising, he shook his head, '' Lord, there is naught '' . .
The King's face changed from mocking mirth to wrath;
His thin lips closed, his wrinkled brows grew grim . .
'' Down with the fool, and pluck his finger-nails
Out by the roots! Then drive in red-hot pins '' . . .

Quoth a slow drawling voice in oily tones,
As vainly struggling I was flung again,

" Lord King, I pray thee keep this knave unscorched
Until to-morrow's dawn; for I see well
He will die dumb and naught then shall we learn;
The mystery that he hides and will not tell
Can only be revealed to us by one . . .
And that is Maurice, the young Cornish Lord . . .
That he is spy I think not, nor suggest;
But he should prove at least his honesty,
That as an Envoy, not to pry, he comes,
Who did conceal from us and thee, Lord King,
That he had secret messengers afoot " . . .
As spake Lord Conan, slowly, thoughtfully,
A murmur of assent ran through the Hall . . .
The Druid Marven said, " This lad will tell
When we have tested him a little while . . .
I thought I heard him groaning even now."

Fincomarke's upraised hand a signal gave
Unto the cruel brutes who held me fast
That they should cease the work they had begun . . .
Already from three fingers dripped the blood
From the torn flesh, and keen enough the pang . . .
The Druid lied not . . . Once I know I groaned . . .

Said Conan, " Keep him safe, and Maurice too,
Until the morning . . . I will speak with them,
Who know the Brython tongue, am Brython born . . .

Then, if their treason is proved clear and plain,
Or if Count Maurice choose no answer make,
Let them be kept for Beltane Day, and so
Be offered to the Ancient Gods at Dawn,
As is your custom here . . . As once 'twas ours . . .
'Tis but waste time to torture this young fool . . .
I know the breed . . . Though ye may wring some groans
By your keen test he'll mock you 'tween his pangs,
Nor will he tell . . . He'll die and naught be gained.''
Said the old King, as craftily he smiled,
Looking at Conan Meriadoc's face
Which was unruffled, '' I know many things,
I can read men and am ware of their guile . . .
But Cornishmen I fail to understand . . .
Why thou shouldst wish mercy to shew to-day,
Who art not over merciful or kind,
I cannot fathom . . . Yet thy words are wise . . .
If thou canst make thy countryman confess
What he doth plot against us, it is good . . .
If he be guiltless he shall go scot-free,
But this youth dies on the next Beltane Day . . .
For I have vowed to give unto the Gods
The first man judged to-day, nor may I cheat
My High-Priest Marven of his lawful prey '' . . .

I heard no more . . . At Fincomarke's quick sign

They dragged me swiftly from the lighted Hall
Down a long narrow alley, cramped and small,
And flung me neck and crop into a cell
In utter darkness, where was mouldy straw.
I knew it low, for when I strove to rise,
Bound as I was, I hit my head and fell
Stunned on the floor. When I my senses gained,
I found my bonds were loosed, I knew not how.
There was a dim light from a lantern shewn,
By which I saw I lay there not alone . . .
That space confined two others shared with me . . .
One, my Lord Maurice, free, his hands untied,
Who, kneeling by my side, my battered head
Bathed with wet rags and spake some kindly words,
" Oh, rouse thee, lad . . . Surely thou art not dead . . .
Ah! That is better . . . Come! Lean back on me . . .
Art thou not Marius of the Asturians?
Caecilius Marius, whom I met near York?
I knew thee, Sir, at once . . . Art thou come here
To spy for Maximus? . . . 'Tis bravely done,
But courage without cunning never yet
Saved a spy's skin . . . Thou wert too rashly bold . . .
Come, tell me all thy news . . . Nay, he hears not " . . .
For mine eyes turned towards the other man . . .
" See, he is nigh with rage and hunger spent . . .
He listens not " . . . Whispering, I told my tale,
And Maurice heard, nor spake, but thoughtful sat.

The other prisoner was a thick-set man,
Dark-haired, broad-shouldered, and not over tall . . .
Quite young, not more than twenty, I should guess,
Yet with the thews of a much older man . . .
With restless eyes that shewed his quick, hot blood.
Right angrily he shook the iron bars
Across the tiny window firmly fixed,
And swore most lustily in Erse, I thought . . .
Though I speak little Gaelic and that ill . . .
" Black wrath on Cormac Finn and on that boy,
That bastard Niall and his Saxon dam . . .
On their vile murdering Druids, on them all,
And on ye . . . Fools! Why lie ye muttering there,
Sprawling thus helplessly in this vile slime? . . .
Do ye not know in three short weeks 'twill be
Beltane, and we shall die in agony
To gratify these Priests, who think to learn
By carving cruelly our outward shapes
And searching cunningly our inward parts,
The future of their thrice accursèd race?
Can ye do nothing but sit mumbling prayers,
Or talking secrets? . . . Soon 'twill be too late " . . .
Said Maurice, " Say, Sir, . . . Hast thou remedy
Thyself for this? . . . If not, best spare thy breath . . .
Canst thou not help me? Tie this wet rag round
The poor lad's fingers whence they've wrenched the
nails . . .

While I shake up this straw to make a bed . . .
Though faith! I doubt it's wise . . . Foh! It smells
foul " . . .
Said the youth sulkily, " Here, give it me . . .
Though I'm no surgeon . . . Fie! What fiends they
be! "
He took the rag and wound it skilfully
Round my left hand . . . Three finger-nails were gone,
And it was throbbing very painfully . . .
When I looked up to thank him gratefully,
I saw by the dim light his face was pale,
And he was wasted by imprisonment.
Said Maurice, drawing near . . . His great frame bent,
For in that wretched place not one of us
Might stand upright . . . " I'll sit me here,
And Marius shall rest his aching head
So . . . On my knees . . . Now, Sir, wilt tell us this:
Whence camest thou? How long, and why, art here?
And what thy name, an it so please thee, Sir?
Not in discourtesy nor idleness
I ask thee this, but we are prisoners,
Brothers in our misfortunes . . . It may ease
Thy troubled mind if thou thy story tell " . . .
Said he, " I'll tell thee, though 'tis little good " . . .
Some moments sat he thinking, then he spake
And briefly told us his unhappy Tale.

ADVENTURE IX.

Eochaidh's Tale—How Marius escaped from Callanish on a Trading Vessel, and whom he met thereon.

Then Eochaidh[1] on the dirty straw sat down,
With a grimace . . . I had thought his hands free,
But saw from each wrist dangled a strong chain
Linked to his ankles, and an iron belt
Girdled his waist, to which these chains were fixed . . .
Scarcely I caught his words, so quick he spake:
" E'en as a dead man am I . . . I who am
Son of a mighty King . . . My father, Sirs,
Was Eanna[2] Cinnsealach, of Leinster Lord . . .
Eochaidh my name, who am his eldest son . . .
I once had mind to ride to Tara's Halls
And claim my seat as heir of Ulster's Kings . . .
For by the Tanist Law that place was mine . . .
Though I was young and not then wore the Chain,
The Nia Naisc[3] of gold that Champions wear . . .
Another sort of chain than this vile gear!
So I went there, and Crimthain bade me sit

[1] pronounced Yokay. Cf. Keating, Hist. Ireland, (I.T.S.) pp. 405-7; O'Clerigh, *Hist. Ireland*, pp. 115, 116; Rawlinson MS. trans. K. Meyer (Niall of the Nine Hostages).

[2] pronounced Yanna.

[3] Nia Naisc = Champion's Chain. Cf. Keating, *Irish Text Soc.*, II. p. 405.

Upon the High-Seat . . . Crimthain, Fidach's Son,
Of Eber's Line, the brother of the Queen
Mongfinn the Fair, who took the Kingly State
And was Ard-Righ when Niall's father died . . .
Eochaidh Muighmedon[3A] . . All whose sons were young,
And Niall but a bastard . . . Well, I sat
In peace well pleased; but then a Brehon came
Who was called Bairchid, one of Niall's priests,
A learned Druid, who reproving spake,
" It is not lawful, Prince Eochaidh, to sit
In Tara's Hall on Tara's Royal Seat,
And violate the *geasa*[4] of this place . . .
For it is *geasa* and the strictest Law
That none sit there who holds not the degree
Of Knight of Chivalry with Golden Chain."
I looked at him, and he looked straight at me . . .
Crimthain said naught . . . I got up but ill-pleased,
Not wishing to offend against the Law,
Nor vex these Druids, who have secret powers . . .
The cursèd brutes . . . May demons vex their souls!
Then Niall met me, taunted me, forsooth!
E'en as I mounted . . . I had smitten him,
But Crimthain bade me mount and go in peace,
Else he would have me jailed; which vexed me sore . . .

[3A] or Muighmheadhon (pron. Mweevaeon). [4] Geasa = taboo.

That I, his heir, should be turned from his door!
Now, as I rode to Leinster, ill-content,
I sought for shelter from a heavy storm
In a strange house; and lo! As Fate decreed,
It was the house of Laidchean, son of him
Who was the Brehon Bairchid, Niall's priest . . .
But this I knew not, or had ridden by . . .
" Give me a chair," I said, " Bring me some drink . . .
I've travelled far and fast . . . Be quick, I thirst! "
Quoth Laidchean, mocking, " Wouldst thou now sit down,
O Son of Eanna, in my Sire's High-Seat?
Where is thy Chain of Chivalry? Knowst not
The ways of noble Knights and men of worth? "
Now how he knew aught none knows but the Fiend,
For he had stirred not from his house that day . . .
As I, astonished, angry, gazed at him,
He said, and laughed yet more provokingly,
" Thou dar'st not even meet my father's Lord,
Prince Niall, though thy younger . . . Thou didst fly
His presence, didst thou not, right hastily? "
Whereat I spake not, but with my right hand
I struck him down and put my foot on him,
Then ran him through with my short spear, that he
Spake no more words of spite defaming me.

Then, rushing forth, I rode on through the storm
And thought no more on it, but this man's Sire,
The Druid Bairchid, went to Niall soon
And made complaint that I had killed his son . . .
So Niall rode, without King Crimthain's leave,
Who at that time was raiding south of York . . .
'Twas he trapped Fullobaudes, so I heard,
And sold him to the Picts, who slew the man . . .
Well, Niall called up levies of his own
And brought a strong and most imposing host
To waste fair Leinster . . . We had curst bad luck,
Ta'en by surprize and routed everywhere,
Nor would that villainous Druid come to terms.
My people offered gifts of every kind;
Cattle and raiment, gold, and Saxon slaves,
Wine of the best, and women at his will,
If Niall would withdraw from our spoiled land;
But he would not; this Druid he loved much,
Or feared him greatly . . . What could I do then?
My father ailing . . . Dying . . . Since then, dead . . .
My people killed like flies . . . Their homes destroyed?
Well, to prevent the ruin of our land
I gallopped to the Camp of Eochaidh's son;
Dismounted, stood there mute before that boy,
Whose laughing eyes mocked my discomfiture

For one long moment . . . Then, 'tis true, he came
And took my hand, which I quick twitched away;
But he laid his upon mine arm and said,
" Thou art a fighter after mine own heart!
Thou hast done well . . . Surely thou dost deserve
The Chain of Chivalry . . . Come, Cousin, take
This golden torque of mine . . . Thou knowst the right
Of one Prince to give token of good-will
Unto another . . . Wilt thou not receive
From my hands that which is thy bounden due?
I will speak with my Druid privately . . .
Thou shalt pay *eiric*[5] . . . He must take a fine " . . .
I would have thanked him, would have grasped his hand
And been his friend thenceforth, but then came there
That beastly Druid, and with angry looks
Demanded what he called his lawful due . . .
" It is my right, Prince . . . I claim this man's life
Who slew my son, his host, an unarmed man,
A Druid too . . . Thus was it Sacrilege!
Dost think I will take *eiric* for such crimes? "
Said Niall, " Thou hast spoken truth, yet spare
Prince Eochaidh's life . . . He shall atone,
Do penance . . . What thou wilt, so he go free "—

[5] were-geld, or blood-money.

" May the Gods blast the roof above my head
If I spare him," fierce snarled the angry priest . . .
" Thou dost forget, Prince Niall . . Crimthain comes . .
He is High-King . . . He shall be told of all,
And thou shalt be disgraced, in exile go,
Cursed by us Druids, hated by the Gods,
If thou dost seek to shield this criminal " . . .
Whereat young Niall reddened, frowned, and spake . .
With stammering tongue he muttered halting words . .
" Take him, O Druid! Work thy will on him . . .
But say not I had share in Eochaidh's death . . .
Upon thy head the guilt . . . If guilt it be . . .
For after all he slew thine only son
In his hot rage . . . And he must pay his debt
After thy fashion . . . Though against my will " . .
I taunted him with his base cowardice . . .
" Fool that I was to trust a mongrel hound,
Whose Saxon blood has quite washed out the Gael! "
I flung his torque at him ere I was bound,
It caught his shoulder, thence rolled to the ground.
He took no notice, turned from me and went
Without a word, head bowed and hands clenched tight . . .
Thus he, Cromm curse him, left me to my fate " . . .
He ground his teeth . . . Said Maurice, " What was that? "—

" Oh, they tied me unto the Pillar-stone
West of the Slainè, and that evil Stone
Stands steeply sloping . . . High it is and broad,
And perforated not far from the top.
It has a sharp ridge too, as well I know,
For there they made me stand nine mortal hours,
My back against that ridge and round my waist
An iron chain. Now both ends of that chain
Passed through the hole above, and a stout bolt,
Stuck through two loops, kept me braced tight and fast . . .
Yet were my hands free as the custom is . . .
For men stand there as in a pillory
And beg for bread from any passer-by,
Else would they starve to death, as many do . . .
But I was destined to a quicker death,
Though doubtless sharper and more terrible . . .
For Bairchid sent nine warriors there to slay
His enemy in any way they would.
But when I saw them come, by rage constrained
I shook myself, and putting forth my strength
I strained the chain and brake the iron bolt,
Rushed on a man and tore his sword from him,
So made escape . . . though hardly, and sore pressed . . .
Yet I slew three or four, and slipped the rest;

Took ship and fled to Alba, where I met
Gabhran,[6] whom ye call Eugen in your tongue . . .
He proved a friend in need and welcomed me;
He knew what exile means in a strange land,
Far from one's countrymen and well-loved home;
For he with young Ethodius had just come
From Manann's Island,[7] where they had been sent
As tiny children to escape the fate
That doth too often threaten Royal Kin.

Their Sire was Cairbre, who had lately died . . .
Cairbre Cruithneach,[7A] who was daughter's son
To Fincomarke, and Lord of Dalriad
By right of wedlock . . . Was not his wife's sire
Old Angus, heir to Cairbre Riada?
A Goidel and no Pict, despite his name . . .
Given him in mockery to void his claim . . .
Was Cairbre Cruithneach. After he was dead
Romacus ruled o'er all the Alban Land[8] . . .

[6] Cf. Keating, II. 403.

[7] Isle of Man. Cf. Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures*, 2nd edn., p. 663, *note 2.*

[7A] Cf. Keating, *Hist. Ireland*, II. 385. For *Angus*, cf. *Aonghus Feart*, Keating II. 382; O'Flaherty, *Ogygia*, II. 304, but the marriage is a supposition.

[8] Holinshed, 1808 edn., V. p. 109; Hector Boece, trans. Stewart, *Cron. of Scotland* (Rolls Series), I. 595 (18, 477). For *Cairbre*, see *Geneal. Tables*, end of Part II.

Nephew was he to Crathlint, Findock's son;
His mother, sister to the Pictish King
Young Heirgust's father Nectan. Now this Lord
Romacus chased his cousin Angus forth,
And evil wrought to all of Crathlint's Line . . .
Old Fincomarke might by no means restrain
His lust for blood, for this bold Under-King
Did all regardless of his Over-Lord.
Therefore dead Cairbre's trusty well-loved friends.
For fear of harm had his young sons removed
To Westmorland, thence to the Isle of Man,
Where they remained in safety for a space . .
In four years' time the nobles slew this King
Romacus, weary of his tyranny . . .
Angus, recalled, in peace did reign two years;
Then Fethelmagus slew him in the field
Who was his kinsman . . . Soon he too was slain
By cunning of the Picts, by Heirgust's men,
And by consent of Fincomarke, 'tis said . . .
Who did distrust him, therefore he made sure . . .
Then the old King of Dalriad[9] sent word
Unto his grandsons[9A] that they should return

[9] Fincomarke, or Fionn-Chormac. Cf. Keating II. 385, Holinshed V. 107.

[9A] Sons, according to Boece I. 595 and Holinshed V. 108.

To rule beneath him. Lately he hath made
Eugen the King of Alba, by consent
Of the Scots nation . . . 'Twas to him I came . . .
Eugen then offered me a high command,
And the Ard-Righ of Dalriad approved
His grandson's choice . . I thought my fortune made,
But mine ill-luck pursued me . . . Hither came
Young Niall and his Druid, and so worked
On old King Ubthaire's[10] mind that I was seized
Six weeks ago and flung here, as you see . . .
I'd wring young Niall's neck were I but free,
And roast that Druid . . . Curse the pair o' them! . . .
But who are ye? . . . What is thy crime, fair Lord?
This naked youth . . . What mischief hath he done
That they should treat him thus? Here, lad, are
clothes . . .
Rags, I should say " . . He wrapped me in his cloak . .
Count Maurice told him briefly; whereat he
Laughed and then shrugged his shoulders . . . " Well,
we three
Have yet three weeks of life . . . See here! " he cried,
As with one mighty effort he essayed
To bend the window-bar . . . He tugged, he strained . . .

[10] Fubtaire, Ubthaire, or Udhaire = another name of Fincomarke. Cf. O'Curry's Lectures, II. 151-161; Grieve, Colonsay II. 174 (*note*).

He pulled amain . . . " Look! . . . It is loose . . . It comes! "
E'en as the loosened bar gave in his hand
The door swung open . . . Eochaidh swiftly poised,
Despite his chains which sorely cumbered him,
The uplifted bar . . . But said Black Conan's voice,
Smooth purring as its wont in dulcet tones,
Then sudden fierce, as sudden soft again,
" Wouldst kill thy friend? Fool, drop it! Hush, Sirs! I
Am here to help ye . . . I can set one free . . .
Which of ye shall go forth? It must be one
Who knows to dodge the Picts . . . He who can creep
Across the Lines unto the Roman Wall . . .
There is just time; so shall he save ye all
By bringing word unto Lord Maximus."
Said Maurice quickly, " Marius must go " . . .
Said Eochaidh sulkily, " I do not know . . .
I do not see why I should not forthwith
Find my way out . . . The bar is down " . . . Then low
Laughed Conan Meriadoc, " So! My friend . . .
And what about the sentries and the door?
I have no key that will unlock thy chains . . .
This is no window giving to the air,
'Tis but a passage foul it looks upon . . .

Moreover, thy huge frame would stick half-way,
And Maurice here is broader-shouldered still . . .
No, no! 'Twill serve not . . . True! This lad could slip
Between the bars . . . He shall not need to try,
I have a better way . . . A master-key . . .
No one knows I am come save one guard, whom,
When this lad passes him, I'll swiftly kill . . .
By magic men will think that Marius fled
And that he slew the guard by sorcery . . .
None know I bribed the man . . . So! Rouse thee, boy!
Here is a plaided kilt . . . Here food . . . Make haste!
Conceal that bandaged hand in the thick plaid . . .
Drink this! 'Tis usquebagh, water of life " . . .
The fiery cordial choked me, 'twas so strong . . .
Yet was I glad thereof and felt less numb . . .
" Speed thou to Maximus, tell him what's done,
And bid him haste if he would save his friend,
For Maurice, son of Caradoc, is doomed . . .
Partly for thy sake, youngster . . . So make haste,
For these men's lives do hang upon thy speed . . .
Tell Maximus thy General to depend
Upon my help . . . Though I have been his foe,
'Twas chance, not malice, that did make me so . . .
Say that my deeds, not words, shall prove me friend . .

Stay not to thank me . . . Nor to argue, fool!
'Tis thou must go, none other knows the way . . .
Do as I bid ye, or ye all must die,
And I as well, who have no wish thereto " . . .
Said Maurice, " Go, Sir! Greet my friend for me . . .
If I see him no more, tell why I died . . .
That I was loyal to the Roman cause,
Who, Brython born, am Roman citizen
And love the honour and fair fame of Rome " . . .
Said Conan, " Nobly said, Count Maurice, but
We must not linger, even to hear thee
Discourse thus fairly of thy motives high . . .
Sure they will solace thy captivity . . .
Farewell, my Lords! Ere long ye shall be free,
Trust but in Conan Meriadoc's word."
He pushed me through the door, locked it, and then,
Stealthily stepping past me, led the way,
By a horn-lantern lighting our cramped path.
So came we to an arch, where stood on guard
A Pict I had not seen, who let me pass,
Grinning a little . . . Even as he stood
And watched me go I heard a muffled sound,
And turned to see him sink dead to the ground
With ne'er a groan . . . so swift was Conan's knife,
So true the thrust that took the fellow's life,

Smiting behind the ear deep in the throat . . .
We crept along the passage till we came
To where a trap-door in the wall lay close;
This Conan felt, and touched a secret spring.
The trap-door opened and revealed a hole . . .
So strait, so small, it seemed impossible
To squeeze one's body through it . . . Said the Duke,
" I go no farther . . . Hasten thou and crawl
Along this gully . . . Have no fear at all . . .
It leads unto a tree, a hollow oak,
With exit in a field . . . That field is called
'*Buaile an aoin doruis*,' which doth mean
' The Field with but one door ' . . . Just now we stand
Beneath the Sacred Circle . . . Spot revered
For countless ages, where the Standing Stones
Enclose the Altar of the Holy Ones.
Here the Chief Druid offers Sacrifice
At certain Seasons that the Gods be served . . .
Lest thou learn more concerning their dark rites
Than would be good or pleasing in thine eyes,
Hurry, my friend . . . But first take this gold ring
That doth enclose an onyx, strangely graved
With mystic carvings . . This shall pass thee through . .
Take this long knife, 'twill serve thee at a pinch . . .
And here is gold, the chief of master-keys . . .

When in the Field thou must know what to do . . .
Go with that person who shall say to thee,
'Art thou the Seventh Sleeper lately come
From out Death's Shade and from a Living Tomb?
What seekest thou?' Without the least delay
To this make thou reply, 'I am that man;
I seek the help of Shoné, God of Waves,
Whose voice doth call me from his Hollow Caves' . . .
Then do as that man bids thee . . . Now, begone!"
I took the ring and thanked him hurriedly;
Then crawled through the trap-door, and wriggled on
In utter darkness, feeling now my path
Up the long twisting shaft that gently sloped,
And, ever rising, wound its upward way,
Till at long last I thought I smelt the day
And saw a glimmer of what seemed blue sky.
My farther progress was however barred
By yet another trap-door firmly set
Across the gully's mouth. I pushed it hard . . .
It gave a little . . . One great heave, a blow . . .
Despite mine aching finger-tips that bled,
My broken head that throbbed, my heart rejoiced
As it flew open! Scrambling, I clawed up
Into the bowels of a mighty tree,
Even as Conan said, a hollow oak . . .

But here stood one who made my blood run cold,
For it was Brude who late had tortured me . . .
I gripped the knife the Duke had given me,
But he had seen me . . . With a sneering laugh,
He thrust his spear across my breast and snarled,
" What dost thou here, by whose authority
Do prisoners take the air at dawn of day? "
I noticed that he seized me not . . . I shewed
The onyx gleaming in the ring, and he,
Still grinning, said, " Ho! Here hast thou a nail[10A]
Worth ten of those thou lost! 'Tis Cormac's Ring,
The Sacred Onyx . . . Howso got, pass free! "
He grounded his long spear, and slowly moved
Back from my path . . . I passed him, and strode out
Through the cleft opening in the riven oak
Into the meadow . . . Startled, I crept back . . .
Here was a crowd of folk who babbling talked
And moved about the field . . . Oh, I was lost! . . .
A thrust from Brude's strong arm sent me headlong
So that I fell upon the soft wet turf,
Fresh with the morning dew and daisy-spread . . .
But when I got up angrily and turned
To curse the brute I found the oak had closed,
Nor was there sign of cleft in its tough bark . . .

[10A] *Onyx* is derived from the Greek word for finger-nail.

Towards me stepped a man in merchant's dress
Who spake the words that Conan bade me heed
As to the Seven Sleepers. I replied
As I had been instructed . . . Whereupon
He bade me follow . . . " First, young man," said he,
" For mere form's sake I will just strap thine arms . .
Remember thou art slave to no less man
Thon Drost the Trader, who doth now with thee
Complete his tale of captives " . . . With quick hands
He passed a leathern belt about my chest,
Making it fast with cords so interlaced
That as a vice they gripped and held both arms
Close to my sides . . . I was too weary now
To care much what he did . . . Though it was tight,
'Twas not uneasy yet. Then he marched me,
And all the others who stood in that field,
Down to the Quay . . . These folk were captives too,
Both men and women, a right motley crew,
Bound e'en as I . . . He drave us all aboard
A galley that made ready for the sea,
With help of several fellows armed with staves.
When I held back, a giant of a man
With a hoarse laugh me o'er his shoulder slung
As though a bale of wool, then threat'ning, growled,
" Keep still, young fool! Dost think we have the time

To wait thy leisure when the tide has turned
And we are due to sail? Soon will Drost drill
Some sense into thy sconce . . . Lie still, d'ye hear!"
I thought Duke Conan made a mock of me
And cursed him in my heart, as moodily . . .
Not hearkening to the chattering crowd around,
Who cried and groaned and made much clamouring
sound . . .
I lay there on the deck where I was tossed,
And thought of Maurice prisoned for my sake;
Nor saw I any hope of help to come.

Now as I mused, came officers aboard
To make inspection of the merchandise,
Giving the Trader Drost his leave to sail
When he had paid the toll and harbour dues;
Which done, the oarsmen, bending their strong backs,
Rowed the great galley swiftly from the Quay
Adown the Loch towards the open sea.

I lay there for two weary days and nights . . .
Though little knew I of the flight of time,
Who was half conscious, feverish . . . As I dreamed
The bearded face of Drost the Trader seemed
To stoop o'er me and sneer, while his rough hands

Loosened my bonds and clumsily fed me
With nauseous broth, then, heeding not my groans,
Trussed me up tight again and left me there
Tossing in pain . . . I think 'twas the third morn
I looked about and saw that near me sat,
Unbound and richly dressed, two fair young girls.
By their attire and speech I knew they were
British Armoricans from over-sea.
The elder maid had buried her dark head
In her two hands and wept most bitterly . . .
The younger lass, who had brown curly hair
And shining dark grey eyes, said tenderly,
" Lupida, weep not . . . See, our Sucat's[10B] safe,
And thou and I are with him . . . God will keep
His lambs from the wolves' jaws . . . Oh, do not weep,
For it is little use that we be sad . . .
Rather pray we that in the good God's time
We may our parents and our sisters find . . .
Brother, come here and help me comfort her " . . .
At her low call stepped Sucat to her side . . .
A boy not yet sixteen, a well-grown lad,
Like her with curly hair and clear bright eyes . . .
His hands were fettered, else he went untied.

[10B] Sucat (strong in war) = St. Patrick's name as a boy. Cf. Stokes, *Tripartite Life*; O'Clerigh, Hist. Ireland, I., ch. IX.; Keating, *Hist. Ireland*, II., pp. 375, 401, 403.

" Darerca," said he, " God shall comfort her,
Fear not for any peril that betide " . . .
Then they sat talking in soft undertones . . .
Soon I grew cramped and thirsty; with a groan
I turned and twisted to release mine arms . . .
The younger maid saw this and brought me there
Water in a horn-cup from a great cask
That stood upon the deck . . . With gentle looks
She gave me drink and asked me how I fared
And whence I came . . . I told her half my tale . . .
That I had just escaped from Cormac's claws,
That I had hoped to reach the Roman Wall . . .
" Now lie I here enslaved . . . Though two men's lives
Depend upon my speedy liberty . . .
For God's sake, maiden, as thou standest free,
Call here that villain, Master of this ship . . .
Or loose mine arms and let me find a knife
That I may kill myself . . . What use is life
If I thus lose mine honour, breaking faith?
I promised Maurice I would set him free . . .
My General waits for news . . . And I lie here
Trussed like a calf that waits the butcher's steel! "
I groaned aloud . . . Said she, "Alas, poor soul!
We too are captives . . . But three weeks ago,
With our two sisters chattering merrily,[11]

[11] Cf. Tripartite *Life of St. Patrick*, ed. W. Stokes, Rolls Series 89 (i., ii.).

We three were walking in our village home . . .
Bannava[12] of Tabernia it is called . . .
That far away lies in Armorica.
We were but lately come there from the town
Of fair Alclwyd[13] . . . There was my Father born . . .
But he had left his native land and kin
To dwell in Brittany across the seas,
Having relations and appointment there.
We had heard talk of raiding on the coast . . .
How Saxons came and Scots and Irish folk,
Plundering, burning, ravaging our land;
But we felt safe, we lived so near the town
Tabernia . . . Bononia now 'tis called . . .
A great walled city and a harbour strong . . .
Nor knew we that the thieves were near our doors,
For we were told their ships had left these shores . . .
My Father, a decurio[13A] and free-born,
Calpurnius called, this day was far from home,
For he had leave to travel into Gaul.
He with my Mother Conchessa had gone
To see good Bishop Martin, Saint of Tours,
Who was half-brother to my mother,[14] Sir . . .

[12] Tarnanna (Terouanne) near Gesoriacum, i.e. Bononia = Boulogne.

[13] Alclwyd = Dumbarton.

[13A] Member of Municipal Senate. [14] Keating II. 403.

With them my youngest sister went . . . a babe
Too young to leave at home . . They'll think us dead .
Ah! God alone knows if we see them more!
For we were seized by young Prince Niall's men
And dragged aboard his ship . . . He westward sailed
And brought us here, now are we sold for slaves,[14A]
As for my sisters we know not their fate " . . .
She wept a little . . . but, said Sucat then,
Who listened to her tale, " In God's good time,
Dear Sister, we shall come to them again
This side Death's sea or on its farther shore . . .
If we pray God to help us we shall come
To a good end at last and haven find;
Then be not doubting, but of cheerful mind "—
" Well said, young Christian! " snarled the grating voice
Of Drost the merchant, who had come unseen
Behind us and stood laughing at our woes . . .
" Would all my slaves had thy philosophy,
So were my labours less and they'd be spared
Much irksome discipline. Come! Thou shalt go
To a good Master . . . Milchu, a rich man,
A Prince of Dalriad in Erin's Isle,
Doth want a likely lad to tend his sheep . . .

[14A] Cf. Fordun, (trans. Skene) *Hist. Scotland*, IV. p. 75; "*In the time of the elder Theodosius.*"

That shalt thou do, so earn thy food and keep,
Maybe thy liberty in time to come . . .
For ye, my maids! At once shall ye prepare
To leave this vessel . . . Ye are sold to one
Who gave me a good price to find him maids
To serve his Queen . . . Young Eugen, Cairbre's son,
The King of Alba, bade me send ye straight
Unto Alclwyd . . . The boat makes ready now . . .
What! Would ye make a fuss, ye foolish ones?
Your master is a young and handsome man . . .
I might have sold ye unto Cormac Finn
Who is so old that none may count his years,
Yet still he has an eye for pretty girls . . .
Leave off that noise, or I will have thee whipped! ''
For now with shrieking cry Lupida rose,
And flung herself down at the Trader's feet,
'' Mercy,'' she screamed, '' Oh! send us not away . .
Let us with Sucat our dear brother stay . . .
Who shall protect us if we're torn from him?
Thou shalt not do this, Master . . . Master, no! ''
But ran Darerca with a bitter cry
Unto the lad, and on his breast her face
Hid moaning, and her little hands were twined
About his neck . . . He bowed his head and wept
A little, silently . . . '' God knoweth best,''

He muttered . . . Then he said, his head raised high,
Looking at Drost, with brave, though tear-dimmed eye,
" Trader, thou dost a hard and cruel thing
To separate us thus . . . wilt thou not slay
Us all together? I will pray to God . . .
I fear thee not . . . Know, Drost! That thou shalt do
E'en as the Lord directs thee " . . . He knelt down
And with him the two maids; they humbly prayed
With heads bowed down, their hands to Heaven
raised . . .
Drost looked at them a moment, all amazed,
Then sneering turned to me, " Rise, Conan's slave!
Thou shalt go to Alclwyd, so he hath said,
And I am paid to do his will herein,
Else had I kept thee here to pull an oar . . .
I'm short of galley-slaves, and thou hadst soon
Earned well thy keep, for thou art strong of frame . . .
For all thou liest there so weak and faint . . .
I have a cure for shirkers " . . . With a grin
He pointed to the double banks of slaves,
Who, toiling, tugged and panted at the oars.
Full sixty oars the galley had, each manned
By seven men, chained to the sloping bench
That from the gangway to the bulwarks ran . . .
Naked they sat, save each man's loins were girt

With ragged clout . . . They shivered in the wind,
Unwashed, but by the waves that splashed o'er them,
Or by the pitiless rain . . . Else, parched by thirst,
Withering they drooped and cursed, scorched by the
sun . . .
Their scarred backs shewed fresh bleeding from the
whips
Of the harsh boatswains, who ran up and down
The gangways supervising . . . Those who slacked,
Even a moment, from their arduous toil
They lashed across the shoulders brutally,
And if they heard them curse they lashed them more . .
For now the wind had lulled, and the strong tide
Against the vessel pressed and stayed her way . . .
Thus sat these without respite night and day,
Rising and falling with a rhythmic sway,
Pushing the oars, then pulling, as each one
Rose from his goat-skin mat, then dropped again . . .
Against the tide the heavy oars they plied
Till sweat ran down each brawny back and side,
Till pumping hearts nigh burst from the fierce strain,
Yet never might they rest or ease their pain . . .
Though sometimes when exhausted slaves drop dead,
(Thus win the liberty so long denied),
And it is urgent that great speed be made,

I have heard that the boatswains, stooping down,
Will push between the fainting wretches' jaws,
Who yet survive, though drooping on their oars,
To give them strength, bread-sops soaked in strong
wine . . .
Yet not in mercy but to use them more . . .
Month after month in the same place they stay,
Upon their narrow bench they sleep in chains,
Amidst gross filth and foulest reeking air,
Their festering sores untended, till they die . . .
Nor have they hope to escape this living Hell,
Unless some storm in mercy sink the ship,
Or by some rival galley's iron beak
Their vessel rammed doth founder; then, dragged down
Chained to their benches, doomed, they shrieking die . .
I thought on this, and, shuddering, turned away
To meet Drost's mocking eyes . . . In a harsh voice,
" Get up! " he growled, and hauled me to my feet,
" Thou shalt play escort to these maids," he sneered,
" Remember they are Eugen's property,
Or thou mayst find thyself without a skin . . .
These Scottish Princes have sharp ways with thieves" .
He loosed my bonds, " Stand up, thou curst young fool!
I heard thou wert a Roman officer . . .
Hath Maximus no man in his employ

That he sends spying boys more like weak girls? ''
He roughly rubbed some life in my stiff limbs,
Which were so cramped that I was like to fall . . .
I reddened at his words and swore at him,
At which he laughed and rubbed me all the more . . .
He gave me meat and wine, which I devoured,
For I was famished . . . Though his words were coarse,
With stinging insult, in his eyes there gleamed
A spark of kindliness, or so I thought . . .
I would have thanked him, but he turned away
With a gruff laugh . . . '' Give thanks where due, my son . . .
Duke Conan paid me well . . . Yet hark thee, lad!
I do not think he loves thee overmuch . . .
Maurice of Cornwall less . . . He but makes use
Of him and thee and me for his own plans . . .
The Gods know what they be . . . Make ready there!
Lower away that boat! '' The boat was slung
Overboard smartly by the boatswain's gang . . .
Men loaded her with cargo for the shore,
While each tired rower rested on his oar . . .
Casks full of fish and whale-oil, and besides,
Elk-skins and other pelts, with reindeer hides;
Great Gaelic hounds and little shaggy dogs
That were bound for Marsilia,[14a] or for Rome,

[14a] Marseilles.

For hunting and for games or circus show . . .
For these huge Scottish hounds,[14C] as thou dost know.
My General, shew good sport . . . Have we not seen
Them break the necks of bulls on whom they spring?
As for the little tykes . . . They're crafty beasts.[14D]
The painted Picts have trained these hardy dogs
To follow up their prey with eagerness . .
They call them Agassins, or terriers . . .
Though they are small as are the useless pets
That women pamper, they are better worth . . .
Not like are they to lazy lapdog breed
That idly lie and fatten as they feed
On dainty morsels . . . Nay, but fierce are they,
Quick to kill vermin, armed with venomous teeth
In heavy jaws. Crook-limbed and tiny-eyed,
Lean-flanked and spare, with rough and bristly hide,
Furnished with tough hard pads and sharpest claws
That serve them well when they dig out their prey.
Not only, nose to earth, do they track game,
But keen beyond all other breeds are they
To note the slightest scent that the wind bears;
And, when their quarry they have brought to bay,
Shrieking far worse than any screaming girl,

[14C] Cf. Claudian, (*Stilich.* iii. 301) and Elton, Orig. 294, *note 1.*

[14D] Oppian of Syria, *The Chace*, (*The Agassain*) trans. Bourquin, p. 158-9. Cf. Whitaker, *Manchester*, I. p. 328.

They call their masters; then, in triumph kill! ”
Said Maximus and laughed, “ Hold, Duplicar! . . .
Thou must find me a brace of just such dogs . . .
I'll take them South . . . But now, tell on, my lad!
Thy hunter's craft keep for another day ” . . .
Said Marius, reddening, “ Not much room was left
Aboard the boat when all this was stowed in . . .
Now came our turn; quickly they lowered us,
Despite the maidens' piteous wailing prayers,
Into the tossing craft . . . Eight boatmen leapt
Aboard her, and began to hoist the sail . . .
Quoth Drost, “ Cast off! Thou Griff and Rory, do
Just as I bade ye . . . Take the maidens twain
Unto King Eugen's stronghold at Alclwyd,
But set this youth upon the northern shore
Above the Castle . . . Give him food and wine,
And harm him not . . . For he shall go in peace . . .
So, pretty ones, farewell, and a fair wind!
And, thank the Gods! I'll hear your cries no more,
For they nigh deafen me ” . . . Then Sucat called
Unto his sisters, “ Courage! I know God
Sends me for some wise purpose o'er the sea,
An exile and a slave . . . I shall return . . .
Mine eyes are opened through my misery . . .
I will prevent the day-break with my prayers . . .

Sisters, pray ye " . . . We heard his brave young voice
Long calling out to cheer us on our way,
Until the galley vanished in the mist
Westwards, but we south-east sailed 'fore the wind
To make the mouth of Clyde . . . Darerca sat
Down by my side. Gently she asked my leave
To bind my hand that all unbound hung down
In helpless fashion . . . This I let her do,
For I was sorely weary, sick and faint,
Though I liked little that such tender maid
Should see the havoc they had wrought on me.
With many a murmured word of pity she
Tied up my fingers . . . " See, Lupida! See
How evil men have dealt with his poor hand!
What can I do to ease the cruel pain? "
Quoth I, embarrassed, not used to fair maids'
Deft bandaging and sweet consoling ways,
" Why, little lass! What ill did harass me,
Sure, all is banished by thy gentle touch . . .
There is but little pain since thy soft hands
Have taken mine in charge " . . . Whereat she blushed
And sighed, " Thou mak'st a jest of me,
Yet have I done my best " . . . Then I replied,
" Dear maid, had I thy brother been no more
Couldst thou have done . . . What! Thinkest thou

That I would mock at thee? I'm not so vile,
Nor so ungrateful . . . See, the sun sinks down
And it is almost dark . . . Thou must be tired,
Thy sister too . . . I'll guard ye while ye rest."
Then hand in hand they sat close to my side,
O'ercome with sleep . . . Darerca's drooping head
Dropped softly on my shoulder . . . My right arm
Crept gently round her, peacefully she slept
Till it was dawn. Her sister also lay
Resting in quiet wise. So up the Clyde
We drew with wind and tide, and came at last
Unto Alclwyd that I ne'er thought to see . . .
Here the maids left me, by four boatmen led
Up to the Castle perched upon a crag . . .
Sadly I watched them go, for loath was I
To part from them, not knowing what their fate . . .
O God! Be merciful! Would that I knew! . . .
I dared not linger . . . I was made to land
Above the Rock, nor came I in the Burgh . . .
The boatmen bade me haste . . . They had no need . . .
I took a few gold coins from out the pouch
That Conan gave me, and soon bought a nag
In the Horse-Market just without the Town,
So rode towards the Wall of Antonine . . .
I was too weak to walk, so spent was I . . .

The rest thou knowest, Sir . . . The Picts caught me . . .
I need not speak of what they did to me " . . .
He shuddered, and his face grew deadly pale . . .
Marcellus gave him wine . . . He drank, then said,
" But I escaped, and thou didst rescue me . . .
For safety's sake I had tied in my hair . . .
Grown long, Pict fashion . . . The strange onyx ring
That Conan gave me . . . Wilt thou take it, Sir?
It may be useful yet " . . . Said Maximus,
Taking the ring, " I thank thee, Duplicar . . .
Thou hast shewn courage and a ready wit
In face of death, e'en if some rashness too . . .
Thy fortitude and promptness yet may save
Mine old friend Maurice . . . God grant it be so!
And thou hast fairly earned thy pardon, lad,
For thy late lapse . . . Shalt hear no more of that . . .
Yet as thy cognomen henceforth bear thou
The name of Restitutus, for thou art
Restored to us e'en from the jaws of death . . .
I will report this to our General . . .
Thou'lt get promotion . . . Sure the Count will say
Thou art the bravest soldier of us all;
And thou shalt have the Oak-leaf Crown to wear;[15]

[15] *Corona Civica* of oak-leaves, given for saving a Roman citizen's life.

A Triumph surely thou shalt live to see . . .
My pair of Scandian gladiators whom
I bought at a great price, I'll give to thee . . .
To match them fairly Saxons we must catch . . .
In thy fair honour games we'll hold, my son . . .
I know 'tis out of fashion now in Rome
To hold these sports . . . See, Theodosius sneers!
But never mind, lad . . . On Great Hadrian's Wall
In the old ways we'll take our pleasure still.''

ADVENTURE X.

How the Roman Fleet sailed from Clyde Mouth to the Sound of Jura—How Maximus essayed the Perilous Passage of Corrie-Breachan and how the Galleys narrowly escaped from the Whirlpool.

So from the mouth of Clyde our ships sailed on,
Till to the Sound of Jura we were come;
From which broad channel to south-east we saw
The Arran mountains that o'ertop Kintyre,
Whose green and fertile shores extended far
Beyond our sight, lost in a faint blue haze.
Unto the west lay Jura's barren isle,
A rugged mass of mountains stern and wild.
Four naked peaks aspired above the rest,
Two of which sailors in their parlance call
The Paps of Jura; from her stony breast
Rounded they swelling rise; to mariners
A landmark and a guide o'er stormy seas.
Far to the north a chain of islets lay
Just seen on the horizon; to the south
Ricina's Isle,[1] that lies off Erin's shore.
South-west loomed Islay's undulating form
Swathed in grey mist; a moment seen, then gone,
Hidden by Jura's heights . . . Before us rose

[1] I. of Rathry.

The massive rock of Scarba, whose steep cone
Gleamed as though polished silver, bright and bare,
With bands of dark grey slate streaked here and there.
Skirting the base of the great precipice[1A]
We saw a broad grass-carpeted green beach,
Where in the hollows the young bracken sprang
Already tall, whence hinds upreared their heads;
And on the cliffs' green ledges I saw stags
Browsing, or leaping up from shelf to shelf,
Active as mountain goats . . . Now Scarba is
To north and west barren unto this belt
Of richest emerald, but on the east
Its gently sloping sides by a great wood
Of dark and gloomy pines are covered o'er,
Of which we saw the lofty topmost spires . . .
Now we drew near with all our sails full set
Before a brisk stern wind unto that gulf
That betwixt Scarba's Isle and Jura lies . . .
The tide was at the full . . . Aurelius came
With a grave face to speak with Maximus . . .
" Prefect," said he, " We are three hours too late;
This narrow channel should have been passed through
Ere the great volume of the racing tide
Was forced into its long and narrow gulf.

[1A] i.e. ridge.

Thou see-est yonder how the sea now boils
Fermenting e'en as water in a pot
O'er a fierce fire; and it doth seethe and froth,
Bubbling in whirlpools that can drag ships in
E'en as an octopus with suckers draws
Its victims to their doom . . . 'Tis an ill fate . . .
Unlucky are the souls of men that drown . . .
Wilt thou that we down helm and go about,
Furl sails and anchor in some sheltered bay,
Till from the turn of tide three hours have sped,
So may we safely pass? " Said Maximus,
" Is there no other channel? " Quoth he, "Aye,
There are two others, Lord . . . One of them wide,
'Twixt Scarba lieth and the Luing's Isle,
Then northward flows with Lurga on the left;
But by full many islets is it thronged
And sunken rocks, nor do I know the course.
Moreover both sides of that sound are held
By Dalriad Scots, for here the harbours lie
Of Fincomarke's great fleet . . . 'Twere best avoid
This double peril . . . There is a small sound,
The Grey Dog's Strait, that is the Little Gulf,
'Tween Lurga's Isle and Scarba's Northern Head,
But 'tis too narrow, Sir . . . One cable's breadth;
And during ebb and flow the water tears

Along that channel with such fearful force
No ship or boat may then pursue her course;
But the Great Gulf that lies ahead of us
Is in its narrowest part six cables broad,
And I have sailed through once without mishap
E'en at full tide, though it is hazardous . . .
Wilt thou that we shall risk it? Say the word " . . .
Said Maximus, " We have no time to lose . . .
Essay the passage, Navarch . . . I fear not;
I trust in thee and thy discretion, Sir . . .
With thy good leave I will stand in the bows
And mark this wondrous boiling of the waves " . . .
The Captain shrugged his shoulders, "As thou wilt,
Thou dost command here, noble Maximus . . .
Mela, go forward! Thou know'st well these seas,
Tell then the Prefect all that he would know."
Said Maximus, " Come, Theodosius, thou . . .
Gerontius too, with Andragathias,
An he so choose " . . . The latter looked askance . . .
He was by birth, some said, a half-bred Goth,
But Scythian born, come from the Black Sea Coast . .
Now the Commander of the Rhenish Horse,
Well liked by Maximus . . . A tall lean man
With red-brown hair and curly close-trimmed beard;
Fierce bright blue eyes that had a savage glare

When he was wroth . . . a not uncommon thing . . .
For he was fiery-tempered, often cruel
In his quick rage; but Maximus loved him
For his good horsemanship and his great skill
In handling troops of untrained cavalry . . .
Aye, he could drill them, lead them in a charge,
Knew well his trade, but he was dour and hard.
Now he looked pale and stammered, "Prefect, thanks.
But I'm no seaman . . . Faith! This fresh'ning breeze
And rolling ship doth not increase mine ease . . .
With thy good leave, Sir " . . . Here he hurried aft,
Diving into the cabin . . . Some there smiled . . .
Theodosius laughed aloud and jesting said,
" Our Gothic friend has met his match at last . . .
Oft has he sworn that ne'er a steed was foaled
He could not master, but this wild Sea Horse
Has fairly thrown him . . . See, he sprawls at length
And groaning rolls his eyes, and utters vows
In helpless wise . . . 'Tis shame to laugh at him
But I can't help it . . . Time it is enow
His pride should be abated who doth crow
So loudly o'er us all . . . How dost thou, man?
Shall Quintus bring thee a rich dainty meal,
A fricassee of freshly roasted pork,
Garnished with onions? . . . 'Tis a goodly dish

I saw the cooks preparing even now " . . .
The unhappy Prefect of the Tungrians groaned,
And choking cursed Theodosius sullenly,
Then turned his back on all and heaving lay . . .
Said Maximus, " Let Andragathias be,
Nor vex him further . . . He must pay his toll
Unto the Sea-gods . . . We will to the prow
To watch this battle 'twixt the wind and tide . . .
Quintus, hold fast, lad . . . Keep thou by my side . . .
An thou slip overboard think not the ship
Shall be brought to for thee or any man,
Or slacken speed . . . So bear thou that in mind! "
Now we stood on the foc'sle in the bows,
Clutching the head-rail, and from there saw how
The Western Ocean poured in mighty force
His troubled waters through that narrow sound.
The tide at one hour's flood ran furiously
With a great whirling, foaming in its rage . . .
The white waves met and clashed where sunken reefs
Lay buried 'neath the surface . . . Here they dashed,
And in some places whirlpools we could see
Where the churned waters raged unspeakably . . .
As though some tortured giant writhing lay
Beneath the waves, twisting right horribly . . .
And ever and anon rose up the sea

As 'twere a pyramid in Egypt seen;
A great green column shooting from the depths,
Spouting as high as our topmast, and then
Bursting with loud report when the white spray
Was blown and tossed in tumult by the wind,
Scattered afar in clouds of feathery steam . . .
So the great surging watery cataract
Fell down into the sea and bored therein
A deep and hollow chasm . . . Then once more
The rushing waves sprang upward to the skies . . .
Quoth Mela, " Lord, see'st thou yon whirlpool boil
That lieth on our counter? " Said he, " Yea . . .
How callest thou the same? . . . It seems to me
Like to a marble rock when the waves spout,
But now it changeth, and doth look to be
A woman's shape, close wrapt in cloak of mist . . .
What is it, sailor? " Quoth he, " Lord, know thou
That some folk do this Corrie-Breachan call,
That is, the Cauldron of the Speckled Seas,
But that name doth, I think, apply to all
This troubled strait wherein the waters foam . . .
This whirlpool truly has another name;
It is the Cailleach,[2] that most wicked Hag
Who ruleth Scarba's Isle "—" What meanest thou? "

[2] pronounced Kay-ach.

Cried Maximus, " The ghost of some dead Queen? "—
" Nay, nay, my Lord . . . The Caillach lives, and she
Rules also Skye . . . Scathach[3] her rightful name " . . .
Said Theodosius laughing, " Why, my man!
That evil Queen lived much before our time . . .
Did she not train young Coolin[4] when a boy,
So I have heard our Irish prisoners say . . .
He was a hero who died years ago
E'er Finn MacCoul was born, who long is dead " . . .
Said Mela gravely, " Tribune, it is so,
And yet Queen Scathach lives . . . The Isles of Mist
Are still beneath her governance . . . Folk say
She takes yon shape, like to a marble rock,
To capture those who dare to pass this way . . .
Now, now . . . See ye? . . . She puts her kerchief on,
Her cap o' mischief . . White-wreathed is her head . .
Now she dissolves in foam and fades away . . .
Alack! I fear her " . . . Said Herenius then,
Who silent stood to watch our perilous course,
His hard face pale and drawn . . . " Mela, go aft!
Tell thou the Captain we make now lee-way
And are caught in the current . . . Yonder Hag
Has got us in her clutches . . . Fools were we

[3] pronounced Skea or Shea.

[4] *Cuchulain*, pronounced Coolin or Coohoolin.

To try to pass when she her white cap dons . . .
Was it not here that the young Irish Prince
Brecan, Partholon's son, long ages since
Fell in her snare, with all his fifty ships,
As he went trading on the Alban coast? . .
His black hound brought his body to the shore,
But she who loved him saw him nevermore . . .
Dead and unhouselled now on Jura's Isle
His bones rest in a cave, and by his side
Those of his faithful hound do also bide . . .
See ye, my Lords, how the seas whirl around[5]
Like to a mill-wheel's paddles, and revolve
Till they and all that floats on them are drawn
Into those dreadful depths . . . Wide open gapes
The Corry's mouth as yawn the jaws of Hell . . .
All Erin, aye, and Alba it could suck
Into its greedy gullet . . . We are doomed . . .
Within that vortex soon shall we be whirled
Unless . . . Unless " . . . Quoth Maximus, " How now?
What meanest thou? Is there no means to 'scape
This danger that draws near? Have we not sails
And many lusty oarsmen? "—" Sir, the wind
Now blows us to our ruin, and our oars
This current may not stem . . . See how we drift

[5] Cf. *Cormac's Glossary*, trans. J. O'Donovan, ed. W. Stokes.

Faster and ever faster . . . Help us, God! . . .
Unless our Captain does the only thing
That now may save us . . . Prefect, we are lost! ''
Cried Maximus impatiently, '' Why then
In God's name let him do it speedily . . .
Where is the Captain and why loiters he? ''
Came then the Navarch and with harsh voice called
Unto the Boatswain, '' Faustus! Cast the lots!
Take the ten slaves marked down for punishment . . .
We can spare one of them . . . But haste, man, haste!
There is scant time '' . . . Then Faustus and his mates
Brought dice and cast . . All craned their necks to see . .
The lot fell on a rower who sat aft;
Him they unchained and led towards the prow . . .
It was that fellow Maximus had spared,
Who had, since then, by his curst[6] sulky mood,
Incurred the Boatswain's anger and reproof,
With promise of right heavy punishment
When we came into harbour . . . Now he stood
Pale but defiant, with his head unbowed,
Glaring at us . . . I saw my Master start . . .
He spake in a low voice, yet this I heard . . .
'' Good God! Theodosius, seest thou? 'Tis he . . .
I had suspected it . . . Now am I sure . . .

[6] Curst = cantankerous.

Petronius Niger, who served in the Guard . . .
Dost not remember him in Africa?
He was dismissed and broken at the time
That I fell in disgrace . . . I never knew
The truth of it . . . I heard . . . Oh, many things . . .
Probably lies . . . What would they do with him? . . .
Navarch, what means this? '' Said the Captain then,
His eyes grown hard, his cold voice sharp and stern,
" If ye would pass this whirlpool without harm,
Avoiding Scathach's clutches that deal death,
We must appease the Hag . . . She doth demand
That something living shall be thrown to her
Which she may swallow . . . Instantly will close
That vortex for a space, and those white waves
Will for a moment cease to spin and churn,
So shall we pass in safety . . . Now, my lads! ''
Called he to the hortators who held fast
The unresisting victim . . . " Up with him!
Haul him upon the prow . . . But bind him not;
Hold fast his arms, but loose those shackled hands,
For as our messenger he must go free . . .
Give him three minutes' grace that he have time
To say a prayer if he have mind thereto . . .
Then grasp him neck and waist, so up with him
And overboard . . . He hath earned death long since,

And he shall have his due, yet save his soul
By salving our good ship and all her crew . . .
As sin-offering he shall for us atone . . .
Now grip him well and firmly . . . Heave him ''—
" No!
Hold there!'' cried Maximus. "Art heathen men
That thou wouldst do this thing? Wouldst sacrifice
To devils?'' Said the slave in sullen tones . . .
While with a shrug the Captain stood aside,
Eyeing with a grim smile the rushing tide . . .
" I'm willing . . . Why then stay him? Dost thou think
That such a life as mine is worth the while?
Leave go mine arms, fools! Set me on the brink
And I will plunge into yon cauldron's whirl . . .
Though not for your sakes, nor to save the ship . . .
Blast her and all her crew! . . . But for release
From this vile thraldom I would dive to Hell . . .
It would be happiness compared with this . . .
D'ye think I want to die upon the cross,
Or by the new decree be burnt alive?
My life is forfeit by your cursèd laws . . .
I struck an officer but three hours since,
And that is mutiny, as ye well know '' . . .
Said Theodosius, " Throw the poor wretch in,

He will drown quickly in this raging sea,
'Twere better he should die thus speedily
Who was thy comrade once." Said Maximus,
" Not so . . . I will hold inquisition . . . Captain! See
That this man be put back unto the oar . . .
Let him row forward for the nonce that he
May 'neath some other boatswain's mate be set,
Lest further trouble rise . . . As for the rest . . .
Canst thou not reef and let us sail close-hauled?
Let all the oarsmen row as if the Fiend
Were on our traces . . . As may be he is . . .
Then cast a barrel of our choicest wine
Into yon vortex . . . It a sop shall be
To Scathach and the Guardians of the sea . . .
But look alive, Sir! For we draw full near " . . .
'Twas done . . . The barrel broached, and poised aloft
Out from the prow just in the nick of time
By the strong-armed Herenius . . . For we drew,
In spite of our trained rowers' steady pull,
Nearer unto the ferment, and we saw
The gaping vortex yawn, the waters boil,
And foam go up as steam . . . The mariners
And soldiers whispering stood with faces drear;
I gasped, and looked at Maximus in fear;
But he, though pale, stood firm and even smiled

To see me shiver. His hand on mine arm
Gave me some confidence, and I saw too
That neither Theodosius nor the slave
Quailed at the peril . . . For Petronius stood,
Still held by the two warders, with a sneer
On his thin face, and Theodosius leant
Over the gunwale watching the swift waves
Racing in frothy tumult. Then there cried
The Captain of the Galley loud and clear,
" Heave ho! Herenius! " Who flung far the cask
With all his strength and skill into the waves
Just as the vortex yawned, whereat it closed
And swallowed up the barrel e'en as though
It were an ogre's mouth that did devour
Some delicacy rare. So were we saved,
For the wind veered that moment, blowing now
Athwart the whirlpool, and our Captain called,
" All hands to stations! Haul back the head yards!
Ready about! Let go the lee forebrace!
Hard down, Hesperius! Down helm and 'bout ship!
Cheerly, my lads! The main sail slack away!
So let her scud before this wind abeam,
Thus make the open sea an the Gods please!
Faustus, ship oars! Your rowers give some ease . . .
Set this knave forward as the Prefect bade,

And see he does his share . . . No skulking, swine!
Or thou shalt wish in vain a hundred times
That Scathach had thy bones whereon to dine."
Petronius answered not, but slowly went,
By the hortators led on either hand,
Unto a bench to starboard, there was chained . . .
The frothing waves drenched him with their salt spray;
His wet rags, clinging close to his lean frame,
Gave no protection from the following wind
That beat about his shivering shoulder-blades,
Bare, and deep-scored with lash-weals old and new.
Crouching, he sat in frozen misery,
And in his sunken eyes a sullen glare.

End of Volume III.

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